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BRUCE
COCKBURN
BONE
ON BONE

Reviews

Bruce
Cockburn
"Masterful"

John Hammond

"I put this little band together with
Jimi Hendrix playing lead guitar."



penguin eggs

billy bragg
valerie june
the wailin' jennys
the young 'uns
mel baiman

ML

5

P46

no.75

2017

MUSIC

ffa rex

Issue No. 75 autumn 2017 \$5.99



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2017-2018

HOT CLUB EDMONTON

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

RADICAL REELS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

THE EVERLY BROTHERS EXPERIENCE

Featuring

THE ZMED BROTHERS
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

TERRY O'REILLY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12

THE STEELDRIVERS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14

PORT CITIES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18

SAMANTHA MARTIN & DELTA SUGAR

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20

I GOT RHYTHM: THE SCIENCE OF SONG

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22

THE SMALL GLORIES AND AHI

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27

NASHVILLE HURRICANE

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2

BIRDS OF CHICAGO

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3

ALEX*CUBA

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4

VISHTÈN

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9

JADEA KELLY
AND SWEET ALIBI
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10

WILLIAM PRINCE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

THE ENNIS
SISTERS
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

MICHAEL BERNARD
FITZGERALD
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

CALVIN VOLLRATH
THURSDAY, JANUARY 11

LISA LOEB
FRIDAY, JANUARY 12

FRANK WARREN
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3

JOSH RITTER
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23 &
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

THE EAST
POINTERS
SATURDAY, MARCH 3

LINDI ORTEGA
FRIDAY, MARCH 16

KOBO TOWN
THURSDAY, MARCH 29

FORTUNATE
ONES
FRIDAY, APRIL 13

AMANDA
LINDHOUT
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Cover Story

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Colin Meloy, lead hand in The Decemberists, recruited traditional singer Olivia Chaney to finally fulfil his historic infatuation with iconic British folk-rock. Together they compile the remarkably compelling *The Queen of Hearts*.

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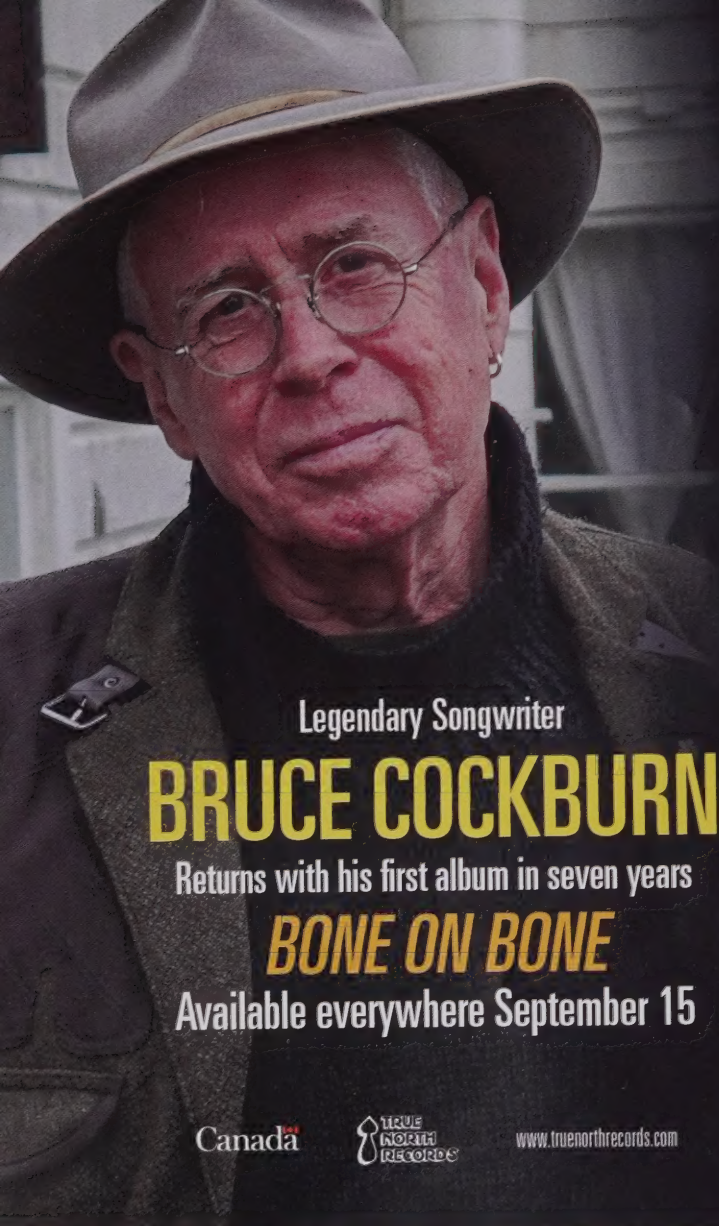
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20 Valerie June

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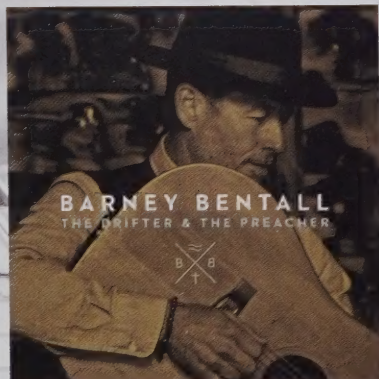
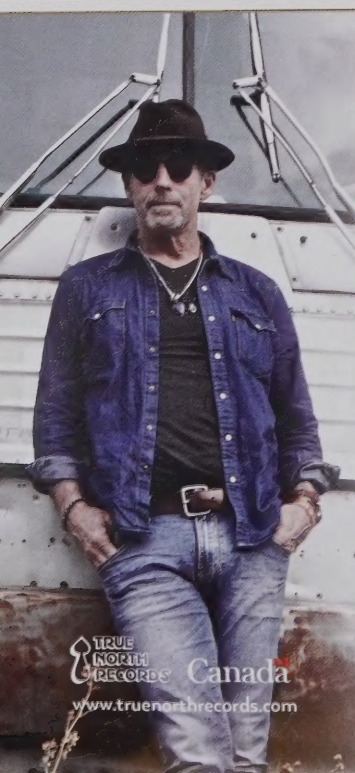


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Canada

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The Wailin' Jennys



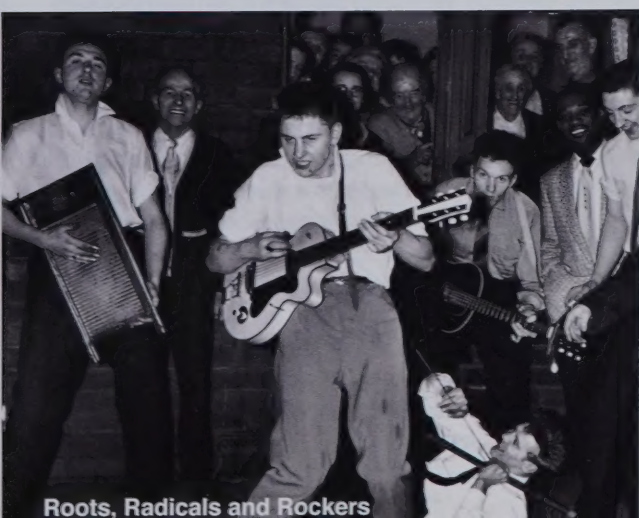
Birds of Chicago



Rachel Baiman



John Hammond



Roots, Radicals and Rockers



The Young Uns

penguin eggs

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2012, however, he finally made an emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

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Canada



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du Canada

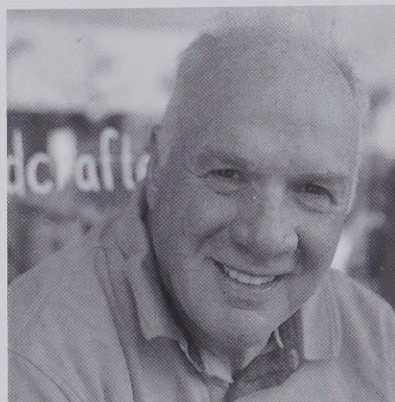
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Editorial



This column begins on a Sunday afternoon on the sunny slopes of the Bear Creek Folk Festival while listening to the stirring gospel harmonies of The McCrary Sisters. I'm in Grande Prairie, AB, to witness the fruits of an ambitious and bold young folk festival artistic director, Sarah Card. So know this from the start: all festival financial burdens rest strictly on her shoulders. Now that's commitment. It also represents an unshakable belief in that community to support her efforts.

Now in its second year, Bear Creek has growing pains to deal with, for sure. Soft ticket sales for starters. But Card's stunning achievements in such a short period of time—Niko Case, k.d. lang, and Laura Veirs headlining in Year 1 alongside Bruce Cockburn; Ricky Skaggs, Mike Farris, Tony McManus, and Kobo Town in Year 2—already confirms its status as a first-rate folk festival offering world-class talent.

Ardent, visionary women, of course, have always played a prominent role in the development of Canada's folk festivals. Take Mariposa, the grand old dame of such events, it started in Orillia, ON, in 1961 with the foresight of community activist Ruth Jones. She and her husband, Dr. Casey Jones, would mortgage their home to keep Mariposa afloat in its fledgling years. Linda Tanaka would do the same in Salmon Arm, as would Suze

Casey in Calgary in its darker days.

And Sarah Card can take comfort in the fact that despite its precarious initial adventures, Mariposa developed into the template for all Canadian folk festivals to follow, mainly thanks to its trailblazing artistic director Estelle Klein (1934-2004).

Klein surely ranks as the most influential of all individuals associated with folk festivals in this country. She was the first to take artists from different countries and cultures and put them together on workshop stages to find out how they might interact musically. Those intimate, eclectic interactions continue to provide the backbone and charm of most Canadian folk festivals today, no matter which gender does the booking.

Klein's outlook was as broad as her ambitions. She booked such diverse talents as Howlin' Wolf, The Boys of the Lough, Jean Carignan, Joni Mitchell, Doc Watson, Alanis Obom-sawin, Phil Ochs, James Taylor...and paid them all the same fee. While that standard payment disappeared in the late '80s, Klein's legacy continues to empower numerous women in the role of festival artistic directors. The current list is long and impressive and stretches from coast to coast, from Susan Lewis (the Filberg Festival) on Vancouver Island to Dawn Beaton (Celtic Colours) on Cape Breton Island. And yes, that great body of exceptional women also includes Sarah Card.

But it's now several days later, and I'm in my office in Edmonton. Alone, late at night, I'm contemplating this milestone 75th issue. Succinctly, it features a diversity of exceptionally talented women—content this magazine strives to include in each issue but doesn't always achieve for various frustrating reasons. This time around, I'm pleased to say, the synchronicity of the content proves substantially pertinent.

— By Roddy Campbell

The Record That Changed My Life

Helen Austin



Helen Austin, the award-winning songwriter with Little Big Lions, recalls the personal impact of Iron & Wine's *Around The Well*.

In 2002, I moved my family from inner-city London, U.K., to a tiny town on Vancouver Island, B.C. I also almost left my (musical) comedy career, but that would take another five years to totally give up.

I always knew I wanted to make real music but had never had the courage to take the leap. Now I had taken that literal leap to a place where comedy gigs were not plentiful and it took a ferry and several hours driving to get to any well-paid club. I now had all my weekends free and there was no excuse.

With two small children, I continued to write songs as I had for the past 20 years, but now I lived in a place where they welcomed newcomers and were happy to have me dip my toe into proper music...and I didn't have to be funny, so that was a bonus.

It was great! But I knew I wasn't writing and singing how I wanted to and had no idea what sound and texture I was looking for. I released my first album in 2007 but knew it wasn't who I wanted to be.

I was a little late to the game with the movie *Garden State* but loved it and then bought the soundtrack. That album had a lot of great songs but one stood out to me and almost hit me like a truck.

That track was Iron & Wine's *Such Great Heights*. I immediately bought the album, *Around The Well*, and immersed myself in all 24 tracks of this wonderful sound that I had never experienced before. There was something about the closeness of the vocal, the perfect imperfection of the guitar, and the honesty of the lyrics that grabbed me and I knew that it had the essence of what I wanted to be.

Coincidentally, that year I had a surgery that meant I wasn't allowed to sing for six weeks. Well, they told me not to use my diaphragm...but that didn't mean I couldn't sing did it?

So I wrote and recorded a bunch of tracks singing really close to the mic in a kind of sing/whisper. Between that and Sam Beam's sound, I discovered that vocals didn't need to be belted out to be heard. In fact, the fragility of the sound made it more immediate and personal. It made me sound like I had always wanted to sound while being kind to my voice after years of struggling with nodules.

So I spent months listening to the album while beginning my own project of writing, recording, and producing a song a week for a year. My husband originally suggested a song a day but I wanted to stay married and

engage with my kids, so I settled for a song a week.

During that time, I got thinking about the fact that Iron & Wine was featured in a lot of movies and TV with great effect. I loved how the songs brought a scene to life and there was something especially wonderful about the song *The Trapeze Swinger* that was so haunting in its use of four simple chords turning over and over, using dynamics to break it up. It was not only the beginning of my love affair with four chord repeated songs but my exploration into music for TV and film.

When my youngest went to school full time, I was given the green light by my family to pursue this with gusto. I quickly found my longtime publisher, Keatly Haldeman (Riptide), who got me many placements in TV and film.

A few years after that I met my Big Little Lions partner, Paul Otten, with whom I continued to get placements while growing into a band from afar, touring and making albums.

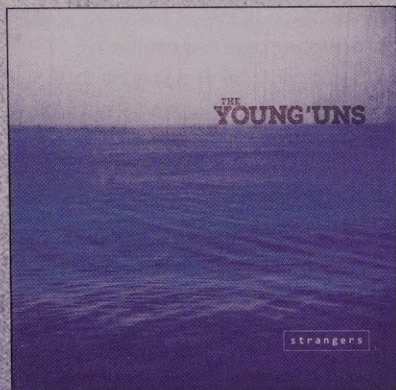
But I always have in my head Sam Beam's vocal, circa 2009, and whenever I have the urge to belt or over-sing, I think of *Such Great Heights* and relax, get close to the mic, and sing with fragility and emotion.



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The Guardian (UK)

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stingray radio

1. **Steph Cameron**
Daybreak Over Jackson Street (Pheromone Records)
2. **Cassie & Maggie MacDonald**
The Willow Collection (Independent)
3. **Jenny Whiteley**
The Original Jenny Whiteley (Black Hen Music)
4. **Donovan Woods**
They Are Going Away (Fontana North)
5. **Scott Cook**
Further Down the Line (Independent)
6. **Alejandra Ribera**
This Island (Pheromone Recordings)
7. **Abigail Lapell**
Hide Nor Hair (Coax Records)
8. **Tomato Tomato**
I go where you go (Porch Light Studios)
9. **The Eisenhauers**
The Road We Once Knew (Black Hen Music)
10. **Jenny Whiteley**
The Original Jenny Whiteley (Black Hen Music)

The most-played folk and roots discs played nationally by
Stingray Music throughout May, June and July, 2017.

fred's

1. **Shanneyganock**
Home In The Harbour (Independent)
2. **Rum Ragged**
Rum Ragged (Independent)
3. **Amelia Curran**
Watershed (Six Shooter)
4. **Harry Hibbs**
Off The Floor (Independent)
5. **Laverne Squires**
A Tribute (Independent)

Based on album sales for May, June and July 2017, at
Fred's Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, 1C 1G5



Alejandra Ribera

sarah jane scouten's top 10



Sarah Jane Scouten

The Be Good Tanyas
Blue Horse (Nettwerk)

The Breakmen
When You Leave Town (Independent)

The Byrds
Sweetheart of the Rodeo (Columbia)

Iris DeMent
My Life (Warners)

Ben Harper & the Blind Boys of Alabama
The Will To Live (Universal)

The Rankin Family
Fare Thee Well Love (EMI)

Stan Rogers
Northwest Passage (Borealis)

Hank Williams
The Complete Hank Williams Box Set (Universal)

Lucinda Williams
Car Wheels On A Gravel Road (Universal)

Neil Young
Harvest (Reprise)

Sarah Jane Scouten's new recording is, *When The Bloom Falls From The Rose*. Our feature on Sarah runs on page 38.

blackbyrd

1. **Various Artists**
Doing It In Lagos (Soundway)
2. **Steve Earle & the Dukes**
So You Wannabe an Outlaw (Warner)
3. **Jeff Tweedy**
Together at Last (Anti)
4. **Daniel Romano**
Modern Pressure (You've Changed)
5. **Colter Wall**
Colter Wall (Sony)
6. **Chris Stapleton**
Vol. 1 From a Room (Universal)
7. **Whitehorse**
Panther In The Dollhouse (Six Shooter)
8. **Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit**
The Nashville Sound (Southeastern)
9. **Mac DeMarco**
This Old Dog (Captured Tracks)
10. **Fleet Foxes**
Crack-Up (Nonesuch)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2017, at Blackbyrd Myozzik,
10442-82 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T6E 2A2 and at 1126-17 Ave., SW, Calgary, AB, T2T 0B4

highlife

1. **Orchestra Baobab**
Tribute to Ndiouga Dieng (World Circuit)
2. **Inna de Yard**
The Soul of Jamaica (Jamaica)
3. **Thievery Corporation**
Temple of I & I (Eighteen St Lounge)
4. **Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit**
The Nashville Sound (Southeastern)
5. **Rhiannon Giddens**
Freedom Highway (Nonesuch)
6. **Dálava**
The Book of Transfigurations (Songlines)
7. **Oumou Sangaré**
Mogoya (No Format)
8. **Tavis E Triance**
A Brief Respite from the Terror of Dying (Independent)
9. **Leonard Cohen**
You Want it Darker (Columbia)
10. **Nina Simone**
Nina Sings The Blues (RCA)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2017, at Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3X5



Orchestra Baobab

backstreet

1. **Big Thief**
Capacity (Saddle Creek)
2. **Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit**
The Nashville Sound (Southeastern)
3. **Daniel Romano**
Modern Pressure (You've Changed)
4. **Bill and Joel Plaskett**
Solidarity (Phenomone)
5. **The Sadies**
Northern Passages (Yep Rock)
6. **Fleet Foxes**
Crack-Up (Nonesuch)
7. **Catherine MacLellan**
If It's Alright With You: The Songs Of Gene MacLellan (True North)
8. **Jessica Rhaye**
Song In Me (Jessica Rhaye Music)
9. **Dennis Ellsworth & Kinley Dowling**
Everyone Needs To Chill Out (Pyramid Scheme Records)
10. **Tomato Tomato**
I go where you go (Porch Light Studios)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2017, at Backstreet Records, at their Saint John and Fredrickton, NB, stores.

soundscapes

1. **Fleet Foxes**
Crack-Up (Nonesuch)
2. **Joan Shelley**
Joan Shelley (No Quarter)
3. **Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit**
The Nashville Sound (Southeastern)
4. **Valerie June**
The Order Of Time (Concord)
5. **Ron Sexsmith**
The Last Rider (Compass)
6. **Ray Davies**
Americana (Sony)
7. **Bonnie Prince Billy**
Best Troubadour (Drag City)
8. **Steve Earle & the Dukes**
So You Wannabe an Outlaw (Warner)
9. **Whitehorse**
Panther In The Dollhouse (Six Shooter)
10. **Jeff Tweedy**
Together at Last (Anti)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2017, at Soundscapes, 572 College Street, Toronto, On, M6G 1B3

ckua radio

1. **Dan Auerbach**
Waiting On A Song (Nonesuch)
2. **Feist**
Pleasure (Universal)
3. **Daniel Romano**
Modern Pressure (You've Changed)
4. **Whitehorse**
Panther In The Dollhouse (Six Shooter)
5. **Alex Cuba**
Lo Único Constante (Fontana North)
6. **Ray Davies**
Americana (Sony)
7. **Rodney Crowell**
Close Ties (New West)
8. **Ani DiFranco**
Binary (Righteous Babe)
9. **Taj Mahal & Keb' Mo'**
TajMo (Concord)
10. **Imelda May**
Life Love Flesh Blood (Universal)
11. **Justin Townes Earle**
Kids In The Street (New West)
12. **Ron Sexsmith**
The Last Rider (Compass)
13. **Boogie Patrol**
Man On Fire (Independent)
14. **Sam Baker**
Land Of Doubt (Independent)
17. **Somi**
Petite Afrique (Okeh)
16. **Deb Talan**
Deb Talan (Nettwerk)
17. **Fleet Foxes**
Crack-Up (Nonesuch)
18. **Jason Isbell & The 400 Unit**
The Nashville Sound (Southeastern)
19. **Harry Manx**
Faith Lift (Dog My Cat)
20. **Pokey LaFarge**
Manic Revelations (Rounder)

The most-played folk, roots and world music discs on CKUA radio – www.ckua.org – throughout May, June and July, 2017.

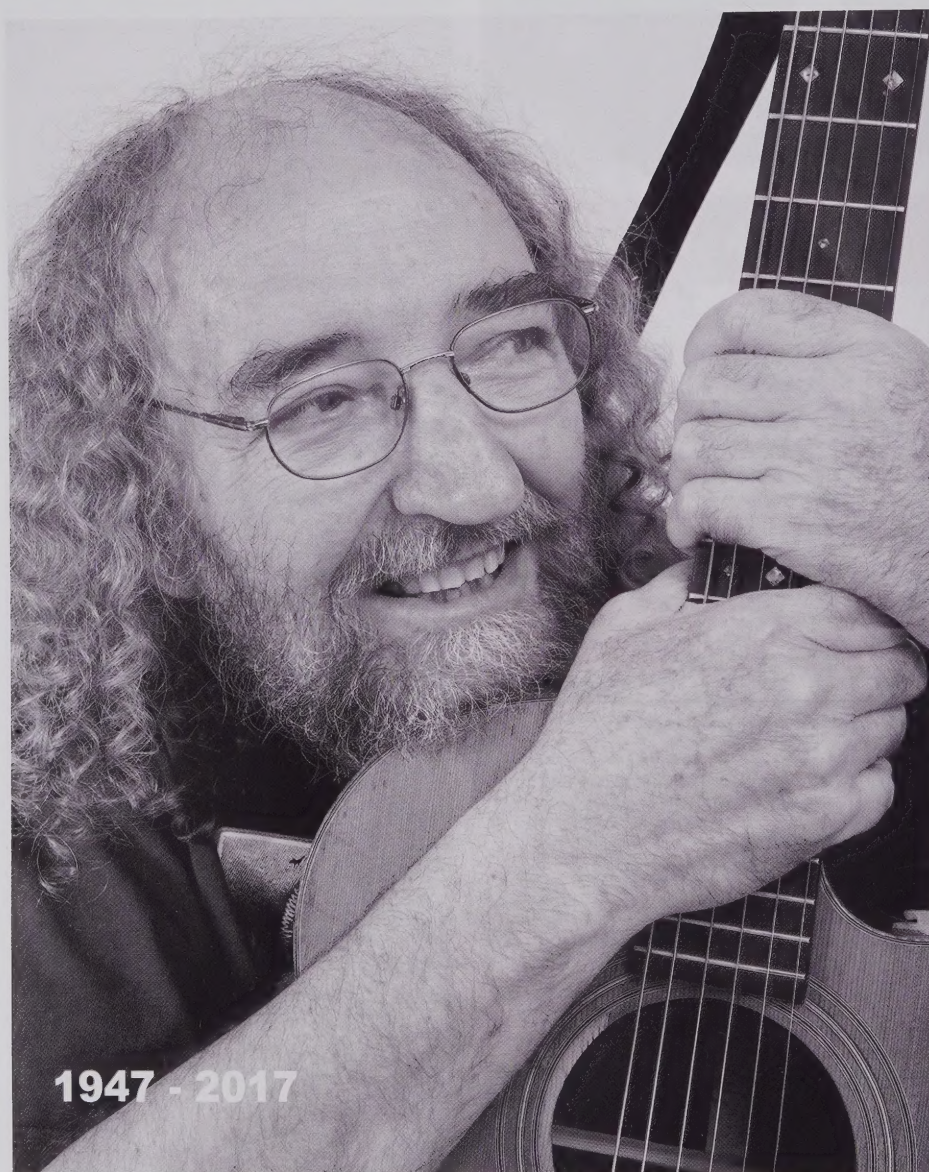


Pokey LaFarge



Mavis Staples

SWANSONGS



Vin Garbutt

Few folksingers, if any, communicated with an audience like Vin Garbutt. A natural comedian with an insightful, laugh-out-loud view of the greater world that he frequently toured, Garbutt also drew criticism and admiration for his topical songs on such issues as abortion and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Largely, though, he poignantly wrote about his northeast of England and its pictorial valleys, picturesque fishing villages, and daunting industrial centres. These he complimented with songs and tunes from the British and Irish traditions by accompany-

ing himself splendidly on acoustic guitar or tin whistle. His hilarious, passionate, highly accomplished stage performances earned him the first BBC Radio 2 Folk Award for Best Live Act in 2001.

Born Vincent Paul Garbutt in South Bank, Middlesbrough, on Nov. 20, 1947, to an Irish, Methodist mother and an English, Catholic father. "There was madness in her methodism," said Vin, quoting his dad, Alfred, while often quipping, "My mother (Theresa) thought a catalytic convertor was an Irish missionary."

Young Garbutt would leave school at 15 and

start an apprenticeship at ICI Wilton—a job celebrated in *The Turner's Song* on the album *Shy Tot Pommie* (1985). Before starting work, however, he had discovered his brother Michael's guitar abandoned in a closet and took to learning the Irish and English traditional songs he heard his mother sing.

A career turning point came in 1968 when Vin and a several friends left their jobs to busk along the Mediterranean coast. There, he developed a belief in his ability as a musician and songwriter, and returned to England determined to become a professional folk singer.

He joined the folk group the Teesside Fettleers but kept his solo options open. He later visited Ireland, learning reels and jigs and collecting songs while polishing his stagecraft.

Initially inspired by the likes of Bob Dylan and The Clancy Brothers, Garbutt grew frustrated by the lack of traditional folksongs from around Teesside and started writing his own. In 1972, he released his debut, solo LP, *The Valley of the Tees*, on Bill Leader's Trailer label. *The Young Tin Whistle Pest* (1975) and *King Gooden* (1976) followed before he signed with the U.K.'s then premier folk label, Topic. His albums now consistently received major national recognition, in particular the excellent *Tossin' A Wobbler* (1978).

But then came *Little Innocents* (1983). A devout Catholic, Garbutt tackled the issue of abortion on two tracks: *Little Innocents* and *Lynda*. It polarized critics. While prominent British music journalist Karl Dallas defended Garbutt's right to freedom of expression, others lambasted him. He lost numerous gigs and much media support in the U.K.

Abroad, though, his hilarious homespun humour and solid working-class ethics continued to build an increasingly loyal fan base that stretched from Canberra to Calgary.

And audiences here in Canada continued to embrace his huge, warm, and endearing personality right until his last tour in 2014. A generous and genuinely lovable character, he always offered a kind word of encouragement for the numerous opening acts at the gigs I witnessed over the years.

All in all, he recorded 13 albums, including *When the Tide Turns* (1989) and *The By-Pass Syndrome* (1991)—both were produced by Alan Whetton of Dexy's Midnight Runners, a fan. His last release, *Synthetic Hues*, came out in 2013.

Vin Garbutt died June 6 due to complications related to heart disease. He was 69. He is survived by his wife, Pat, and their four children, Emma, Tim, Katie, and Louis.

—Roddy Campbell

Rosalie Sorrels

American Folksinger and Social Activist

Born 1933

The inspiration for Nanci Griffith's *Ford Econoline*, the songwriter whose *The Baby Tree* fetched up on Jefferson Starship's Hugo-nominated *Blows Against The Empire* (Paul Kantner admired her work), Rosalie Sorrels died on June 11, 2017, in Reno, NV, at the home of her daughter, Holly Marizu. She was born Rosalie Ann Stringfellow on June 24, 1933, in Boise, ID. Her father, Walter, worked for Idaho's highway department. Her mother, Nancy Ann (née Kelly), wrote and ran a bookshop in Boise. In the 1990s, she curated a volume of her mother's writings, *Report from Grimes Creek After a Hard Winter*, into print—the part-focus of her Green Linnet album *Report from Grimes Creek* (1991).

Aged 19, she wed Jim Sorrels (pronounced sore-ELS). Five children and one marriage later, she did what she was born to do: sing. Her recordings were scattered over many labels ranging from *Folksongs of Idaho and Utah* (Folkways, 1961) to the Grammy-nominated *My Last Go-Round* (Red House, 2004) with Christine Lavin, Jean Ritchie, Peggy Seeger, Patrick Sky, Loudon Wainwright III, and others guesting.

Sorrels told tales that used episodes and imparted experiences from her life the way Loretta Lynn did—many listeners would say with greater force without diminishing either. Born in 1935, Lynn bore six children and sang *Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' (With Lovin' On Your Mind)* and the Allen/McHan/Bayless contraception hymn *The Pill*.

Sorrels took social activism storytelling to new levels. She sang songs, many telling tales or imparting experiences from her own life. Her strong-meat subject matter drew on teenage pregnancy, botched abortion... Her mother compared her voice to "wine, honey, and cayenne". An utter inspiration.

— Ken Hunt



Glen Campbell

Fabled Session Musician and Country Icon

Born 1936

For 60 years, Glen Campbell caught our attention, three minutes at a time.

Eighty of his songs charted, from 70 albums, that sold 45 million copies; 50 million folks tuned TVs to his weekly *Goodtime Hour*.

Even before his mega-hit vocals, he was a sought-after guitarist, part of the famed L.A. Wrecking Crew, playing on 580 arrangements, with everyone from Sinatra to Elvis, the Beach Boys to Merle Haggard, who told him: "Glen, you were put on Earth to play music." Fellow Wrecking Crew member Leon Russell called Campbell, "the best guitar player I'd heard before or since."

Glen Campbell transcended numbers, like the written musical notes he couldn't read, and didn't need to, before losing his long fight with Alzheimer's disease at age 81 on Aug. 8. He became a public face of the dreaded disease, bringing it out of the shadows, much like he played and sang—openly, honestly, and highly impressively.

His fourth and final wife, Kim, a role model for distraught caregivers, said: "Glen thought that was probably the most important thing he could ever do."

Born 80 miles southwest of Little Rock, Ark., between Billstown and Delight, where his father sharecropped 120 acres of cotton, on April 22, 1936, the seventh of 12 children, Glen Travis Campbell started on a \$5 Sears, Roebuck catalogue guitar at age four, performing on radio stations two years later. "It was a lot

easier than picking cotton," he recalled, telling *Time* magazine: "My approach is simplicity."

A much in demand vocalist and session guitarist, but equally competent on mandolin, bass and banjo, he struggled to launch his solo career until 1967, when his recording of John Hartford's *Gentle on My Mind* hit the charts. Four Grammy Awards followed a year later.

Choose favourites from his signature *Rhinestone Cowboy* (also the title of his memoir) *Southern Nights*, *Wichita Lineman*, *By The Time I Get To Phoenix*, among many others, all radio-friendly, naturally, yet perfectly, pitched, timed, toned, phrased, and performed.

For Joe Henry, who posted an eloquent, heart-wrenching eulogy on Facebook, it was *Galveston*. Campbell's 20 essential songs, according to *Rolling Stone* magazine, include covers of The Foo Fighters and The Beatles.

Ironically, it was his legendary photographic memory that would eventually let him down. Announcing his progressive condition, so audiences would be aware of why he might sometimes seem disoriented onstage, he set out on a five-week farewell tour in support of his "last" album, *Ghost on the Canvas*. The tour lasted 15 months, with his children beside him onstage, during which the courageous documentary *I'll Be Me* was filmed. And later, his final album, *Adiós*, was cut, from words, fed a couple at a time, during four-and-a half-hour sessions.

No matter what you think of his legacy—that crossed genres, generations, and cultures—it's difficult to not join the growing global chorus: "Thank you, Glen Campbell, for being so good."

— Bruce Mason



Jimmy LaFave

Jimmy LaFave

Born 1955

Jimmy LaFave, a co-founder of 'red dirt music', and a stalwart figure on the Austin, TX, folk and roots scene, died May 21 of cancer. He was 61 years old.

His death came three days after a tribute, held at the city's Paramount Theatre, in his honour. He put in an emotional appearance in a wheelchair. More than 1,200 people attended the sold-out event to hear the likes of Eliza Gilkyson, Slaid Cleaves, Ruthie Foster, and Gretchen Peters honour LaFave.

A disciple of Woody Guthrie, LaFave was born July 12, 1955, in Wills Point, TX, and like his hero, he grew up in Oklahoma. Stillwater to be precise, where he and Bob Childers forged their red dirt music—a mix of rock, folk, rockabilly, and country, "grounded in the landscape of Texas and Oklahoma."

LaFave recorded *Down Under*, his debut LP, in 1979 and released 20 albums in all, most notably *Cimarron Manifesto* (2007) on Red House Records, which topped the national Americana charts.

While relocating to Austin, in 1992, LaFave regularly attended the annual Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah, OK, and eventually joined the organizing committee. In 1996, Nora Guthrie, Woody's daughter, invited LaFave to appear at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame tribute to her father and at his induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1997.

Jimmy LaFave will also be inducted, posthumously, into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame later this year.

— Roddy Campbell

D.L. Menard

Born 1932

Louisiana songwriter D.L. Menard, author of the iconic Cajun anthem *La Porte En Arrière* (*The Back Door*), died of multiple ailments July 27 at his granddaughter's home in Scott, LA. He was 85.

Doris Leon Menard, widely known as "the Cajun Hank Williams", wrote *The Back Door* in 1962. It was inspired by Williams's *Honky Tonk Blues*. Menard's original recording plus its numerous covers have sold more than a million copies and it has grown into a song all aspiring young Cajun musicians learn to play. His *Un Homme Marie* (*A Married Man*) and *En Bas du Chêne Vert* (*Under a Green Oak Tree*) have also grown into Cajun standards.

Born April 14, 1932, in Erath, LA, Menard met Williams at a club in New Iberia, LA, in 1951. He told Menard to embrace his Cajun culture. Menard would go on to record with such prestigious labels as Arhoolie and Rounder Records and earn Grammy nominations for Best Traditional Folk Album (*Le Trio Cadien*) in 1993 and for Best Zydeco or Cajun Album (*Happy Go Lucky*) in 2010.

He also gained notoriety playing and singing on a cover of Lead Belly's *Goodnight Irene* on Bryan Ferry's 2002 album *Frantic*. Menard would also collaborate with numerous noted Cajun musicians that included fiddler Dewey Balfa and accordionist Marc Savoy.

Menard was inducted into both the Cajun Music Hall of Fame and Louisiana Music Hall of Fame.

— Roddy Campbell



D.L. Menard



Gregg Allman

Gregg Allman

Born 1947

The Allman Brothers Band's refined fusion of blues, rock, soul, country, and jazz, polished onstage by extended improvisation, provided the template for countless future jam bands and laid the foundation for 'southern rock'.

Formed in 1969, and now considered one of the most influential bands of the 1970s, they were one of the first multi-racial bands in the South and included two drummers—Butch Trucks and Jai Johanny (Jaimoe) Johanson—two guitarists—Dickey Betts (lead) and Duane Allman (slide)—plus Berry Oakley (bass) and Gregg (keyboards). Duane, tragically, died in a motorcycle crash in 1971 at the age of 24 as the band scored its first major success with the release of *Live At The Fillmore East*. It went platinum (a million copies sold) as did *Eat A Peach* (1972) and *Brothers and Sisters* (1973).

Gregory LeNoir Allman was born Dec. 8, 1947, in Nashville, TN, a little more than a year after brother Duane. Their father was murdered when Gregg was two years old. Brought up by their mom in Daytona Beach, FL, Gregg, barely into his teens, bought an acoustic guitar with money from a paper route. His brother quickly gravitated to it, too. They would form The Escorts, Allman Joys, and Hour Glass before The Allman Brothers Band. Little Milton Campbell inspired Gregg's anguished, soulful singing, highlighted on such signature songs as *Whipping Post*. But battling substance abuse most of his life, Gregg dipped in and out of the band while recording eight solo studio albums, culminating with 2017's *Southern Blood*.

Married six times, including a tumultuous stint with Cher, Gregg was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1995 as a member of The Allman Brothers Band. They also received a Grammy Award for lifetime achievement in 2012.

Gregg Allman died from liver cancer May 27 at his home in Savannah, GA. He was 69.

— Roddy Campbell

Michael Hill has spent the past 17 years as either a volunteer or as the artistic director of the Mariposa Folk Festival. And now he has written a detailed and engaging history of the trail-blazing event that shaped every subsequent folk festival in the country. It began in Orillia, ON, in the first flush of the folk revival in the early '60s, rose to its peak of popularity in 1972, only to diminish in stature until it almost folded. Rejuvenated by a move back to Orillia in 2000, it has, for the most part, flourished since. *The Mariposa Folk Festival: A History* is published by Dundurn Press.

Questions by Roddy Campbell.

How did you separate your job as artistic director from that of a historian?

"It was a natural evolution. I've been the unofficial historian for the folk festival for the past 10 or 12 years. I looked after archival materials. And so I was always aware of it. My university degree is in history. I used to write for the *Toronto Star* so it was all a natural fit when the story came to be told.

What's the most surprising thing you discovered about Mariposa during your research?

Some of the stories of things that went on in the background were kind of interesting. The fact that Estelle Klein, who was the artistic director for so long, she wanted to put the festival out of its misery in the mid-'80s, and almost succeeded, too. I'm glad she was unsuccessful. That was kind of surprising.

What attracted you to Mariposa?

I'm a guitar player and a singer. I won't say a singer/songwriter as I couldn't write a song for beans. But I always liked that kind of music—Gordon Lightfoot, Bob Dylan, Murray McLauchlan, those kind of people. I was at the festival in 1972, the year Joni Mitchell showed up and took over Murray McLauchlan's slot. I got to see that. And then the next day, Neil Young took over from Bruce Cockburn. That was an exciting thing. That kept me interested. It was really my love of that particular type of folk music, however we define folk music. And then when it came back to Orillia in 2000, I just thought, 'Oh, Mariposa's coming to Orillia; I'll volunteer as a way to get a free ticket'. The second year, I became the site manager. The year after that, I was in charge of organizing the whole festival. And when we replaced



Michael Hill

Randi Fratkin in 2006, I said, 'Well, I could do a good job as the artistic director'.

Mariposa went into decline just as the folk festivals in the West were taking off—how do you account for this discrepancy?

Mariposa definitely went into decline around 1980 or so, just when Edmonton and Calgary were starting. I've always attributed it to the general taste of the people around Toronto wanting more rock when punk was taking off. I like to think people's musical tastes had changed and maybe out West, like out East, maybe there was more of a friendliness towards folk music, or perhaps country music. In Toronto, people were more into groups like the Tragically Hip and Carole Pope and people like that.

How important was it for Mariposa to return to Orillia?

It's been a great benefit to both the festival and Orillia. We figured the festival brings in a couple of million dollars worth of business every year. We fill every hotel and all kinds of restaurants. Businesses feel they get all kinds of financial benefits. So it has certainly helped the town. But as for the festival itself, it has really revived it because it was dwindling away to nothing in the late 1990s. In 1999 it was just a small, one-day affair in Parkdale in Toronto. It was really nothing. When it came back to Orillia, it built and built and built. This past

year was probably our biggest crowd maybe ever. Certainly financially, it was the best year since 2000.

What has been your absolute musical highlight at the festival?

I think Ian & Sylvia getting together and singing *Four Strong Winds* at our 50th anniversary in 2010. That was one of them. [CBC Radio's] Shelagh Rogers was the stage host, and she and I were standing together when Sylvia suddenly appeared at Ian's side. Shelagh was actually crying it was so emotional. And that was the feeling all through the audience. That was pretty special.

My first year doing the job I hired Don McLean as the Saturday night headliner. He got everybody in the park standing up singing *American Pie* with him. That was really special, too.

How do you see Mariposa developing in the future?

I think we'll keep true to the type of music that got us here. One thing about the festival, the audience can expect the same thing, more or less, every year as far as the experience they are going to have. As long as we stay true to that and don't deviate too much, I think we'll be in good shape. We provide a good family experience and quality music and we're able to provide a decent number of big names, too. Stay the course and I think we'll be fine.

Introducing Dave Penny



If you are visiting Newfoundland and Labrador, Dave Penny won't be hard to find. Put your ear to the wind and follow the laughter. Eventually you'll come upon a group of people bending over and gasping for air, holding their sides, and wiping tears from their faces. In their midst: a dark-haired, bearded man, with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his lips, entertaining the howling hordes with cleverly spun comic ditties and driving accordion tunes.

Originally from Mount Pearl, NL, Penny maintains that he didn't hear much in the way of traditional music as a child; it was in fact a performer at a folk festival who changed his life.

"I went to the Terra Nova Folk Festival, I guess I was 12 or 13, and a member of the Moss family from Eastport played the accordion. Whatever happened—I just went nuts, I went mad for it. I got an accordion that year for Christmas."

Penny pursued lessons with a well-known Newfoundland entertainer by the name of Corey Crewe (from the duo Corey and Trina) and performed at the Terra Nova Folk Festival the following year. He hasn't missed a year at that festival since.

Penny acquired a substantial repertoire of local tunes, and worked his way through the comedic section of Kenneth Peacock's *Anthology, Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. He started attending a monthly song circle at the Crow's Nest in downtown St. John's, where he honed his delivery and gained enough confidence to try out some of his original pieces. The first song that he deemed fit for public performance was called *Baz*, a heart-warming, hilarious homage to a puppy that he bought on Regatta Day.

Many of Penny's songs have become instant classics in his home province. *The Ballad of the Elm Span Worm*, a piece chronicling a hideous and long-lasting outbreak of black caterpillars throughout St. John's, received lots of airplay during the infestation. A song entitled *#darknl* (the hashtag used by Newfoundlanders

who dealt with a province-wide blackout immediately after the New Year in 2014) found humour and whimsy in a situation that was frustrating and difficult for those who lived through it.

Much of Penny's work is infused with themes and idioms particular to Newfoundland and Labrador, and perhaps some translation is occasionally required for those who do not live there. However, like most excellent songwriters, he manages to find the universal elements of those localized experiences. Anyone who rides a bike will relate to the David and Goliath-like battle between a cyclist and the driver of a massive pickup truck in *Johnny Chrome*. And for anyone who has been caught up in lottery mania, *Chase The Ace* is a must-listen.

Penny recently took a hiatus from his day job to do more writing and performing, and to promote his new CD, *All Turned Around*. He is also a member of Stage To Stage, a group of four men that specializes in traditional and original recitations. In the near-future he hopes to do some touring, both within the province and on the mainland. That is certainly good news for anyone who enjoys a good yarn, and a hearty laugh.

— By Jean Hewson



Introducing Sam Gleaves & Tyler Hughes

Before they were introduced to each other at the Appalachian Studies Association conference, Sam Gleaves and Tyler Hughes were pursuing successful solo careers.

Both were born and raised in rural Virginia and were drawn together by their love of old-time mountain music and their desire to introduce a new generation to the joys of traditional singing and performing.

“We both grew up in southwest Virginia, but we come from very different places,” Hughes says. “Each of us has our own way of defining Appalachian music.” Their self-titled debut mines this love of their folk roots.

“The record is focused on older songs,” Gleaves says. “We wrote two songs for the record, but the bulk of them are traditional or written in the last 50 years. I wrote the majority of the songs on my album, *Ain’t We Brothers*, basing them on my experience as a gay man living in our region, but I wouldn’t say my songs address the entire LGBTQ+ experience in Appalachia. Each community holds a diverse and varied group of people.”

Wise County Jail, Hughes’s first album, was more folk oriented. “It’s primarily a collection of music from Wise, Scott, and Lee Counties in Virginia,” Hughes explains. “It’s historic music from my home area.”

The songs on the album include folk hits such as *Bread and Roses* and *Sleepy Eyed John*, as well as obscurities such as Ola Belle Reed’s *Tear Down the Fences* and Kate Peters Sturgill’s *My Stone Mountain Home*. The arrangements showcase the duo’s exemplary musicianship and the warmth of their close harmony singing.

“The fact that we’re openly gay gives us more freedom, in terms of material that we choose to sing and how we present it,” Gleaves says. “In some ways, we’re separated from the traditional ideas and stereotypes of masculinity. For example, Janette Carter’s song *Living with Memories* is a tender song that we sing with emotion and vulnerability.”

“On rare occasions, folks ask us what it’s like to live as openly gay men in Appalachia. I tell them most people we know accept us and love us as we are.”

Hughes agrees. “Although people have differences politically, there’s a strong sense of community. People think of us as their neighbours and musicians. Our identities as gay men are secondary.”

While they don’t bill themselves as a gay act, they don’t censor themselves or change the lyrics of their songs for any audience.

“If we think a song one of us has written fits into the narrative of our performance, we sing it,” Gleaves says. “We sing songs that have progressive political messages, like *Tear Down the Fences* and *Bread and Roses*. Tom T. Hall’s *I Washed My Face in the Morning Dew* says, ‘the rich got richer and the poor got poorer and to me, it didn’t seem right’. Those songs address xenophobia, misogyny, and classism. We sing them because they’re relevant to our current political atmosphere, but we don’t state that connection. We let the songs express our views.”

– By J. Poet



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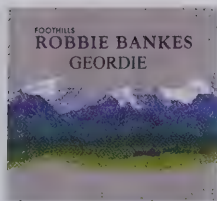
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Introducing

Robbie Bankes

At this point in his career, 22-year-old Robbie Bankes has options. Armed with talent, intelligence, a young man's charms, and an old soul, he is pursuing folk music from a few different angles. Bankes says his folk roots stem from his father's large music collection and his family's outings to the Canmore and Calgary folk festivals. As soon as he was old enough, he volunteered on festival sound stages. He also signed up for pop-rock guitar class, took a few lessons with bluegrass guitarist Steve Fisher, and attended Sorrento's NimbleFingers bluegrass and old-time music workshops.

At 17, he was hosting a traditional music show on CJSW radio and was playing old-time music with Calgary's Mike Tod and Nathan Godfrey. He had an early affinity for instrumental music.

"When I was getting into traditional music, I always listened to fiddle tunes. There's something about the intensity and not having to say anything—they can get you dancing or make you cry."

Specializing in things with strings, Bankes plays guitar, violin, mandolin, and five-string banjo. He also plays the Hardanger fiddle (Hardingfele), which looks like an ornate violin but has eight or nine strings instead of the usual four. He says the top four strings are played like a violin, while the remaining substrings ring in a way he describes as "crazy atmospheric".

Bankes studied the Hardanger at the University of Southeast Norway as part of his BA in folk music. He'll return to Norway from Calgary this summer to start his master's. Although plans may change, his current thesis topic is pre-1940s Western Canadian fiddle music with a focus on Métis and immigrant music.

Bankes recently released his first full-length album, *Foothills*, a combination of traditional and original songs with a mix of old-style feel and modern edge. The first cut is a gorgeous interpretation of *Geordie* using the 1942 lyrics of Arkansan Georgia Dunaway.

Bankes sometimes combines a traditional melody with his own lyrics or, in the case of *Seven Gypsies*—a song about persecution of the Roma people—he pairs traditional lyrics with his own melody.

Between 1880 and 1910, a large contingent of the Norwegian population moved to North America, and in *Ivan, Ivan*, Bankes tells the heartbreaking story of one of those immigrants. While many of the album's tunes are sad and sometimes even tragic, its sound is rich and full of life. Bankes's voice merits a listen.

When in Norway, Bankes lives in a cottage in the tiny town of Rauland. "It's calm, quiet, chill," he says. "Nothing goes on there."

Be that as it may, Bankes has tapped into a subculture of Norwegians obsessed with things American.

"They even have Americana blogs and festivals," he says. In his spare time, he plays in a country band with a French bassist and two Norwegians. He chuckles as he describes himself dressed as a cowboy, standing on hay bales in the back of a pickup truck singing Hank Williams-style country songs to rural Norwegians.

In 2015, Bankes was nominated for Young Performer of the Year at the Canadian Folk Music Awards, likely the first of many accolades coming this young man's way.

www.robbybankes.com

— By Jackie Bell





Introducing

Boogie Patrol

In a province that enjoys its blues music, few acts have worked as hard to win the enthusiasm of fans as Alberta's Boogie Patrol. Now, with the release of their fourth, most-accomplished album *Man On Fire*, the decade-old quintet seeks wider horizons with their "funky blues 'n' rock'n'soul" sound.

That approximation comes courtesy of lead singer and harmonica man Rott'n Dan (a.k.a. Dan Shinnan), the group's chief example of raw energy squeezed into an aggressive party vehicle. He's happy with the band's continuing evolution.

"The music ebbs and flows over time but we're definitely a more polished package, playing better-crafted, shorter songs than we did in the beginning. I think we've learned a lot of lessons over the years, too, and seeing other acts in Edmonton or especially in Memphis left us madly inspired."

Their spirit to entertain has seen Boogie Patrol win the Edmonton Blues Society's competition to represent the city at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis three times, with the band making it to the semi-finals in 2014. Back home, it hasn't hurt to open for names such as Buddy Guy or The Fabulous Thunderbirds.

An augmented lineup made *Man On Fire* a special occasion, prompting the band's first serious tour to Eastern Canada this spring, and they were thrilled to find fans who knew their stuff nearly everywhere they played. That sort of reception continued this summer on the festival circuit out West.

Back in 2007, when Shinnan and guitarist Yuji Ihara met up at Edmonton's venerable blues haunt Blues On Whyte to hatch their own band, they never guessed it would find such an enduring place on the city's music scene. Bassist Nigel Gale cemented the bottom end as sheer effort and frequent live touring around Alberta and then across Western Canada helped solidify the group's cohesive sound.

They made their album debut with *Groove On Or Bug Out* in 2009, followed by *I Try And I Try* two years later, helping them snag a Maple Blues nomination for Best New Band. But it was the disc *Alive* recorded at shows in Red Deer and Calgary in 2015 that really caught the band's performing strengths. Occasional personnel changes over the past few years saw Boogie Patrol's chemistry evolve farther, with Emmet VanEtten's drumming and second guitarist Chad Holtzman.

"We really enjoy working together but it's gotta be a show. You've got to know what you want and please yourself."

Boogie Patrol puts their sweat into it, and few blues bands bring such balanced pacing to their set, finding ways to highlight each member of the group, throwing in occasional tributes to James Brown, The Isley Brothers, or others.

The all-original *Man On Fire* takes everything to another level with guest keyboards from Marc Arnould and a horn section borrowed from their Calgary friends Mocking Shadows. Arranger Murray Pulver also sat in to finesse things as the band's first-ever co-producer, with engineer Paul Yee.

Hiring outside ears made the sessions feel "more effortless and free" for Shinnan while the horns completed a long-held dream to tap some favourite soul sounds. The singer's raspy vocal and Ihara's inventive, mature guitar sounds manage to maintain the band's raw edge.

Expenses preclude taking that larger sound on the road but an international array of positive reviews have left Boogie Patrol eyeing the U.S. and Europe for tour possibilities. This killer blues unit deserves their chance to take it all abroad.

— By Roger Levesque





Introducing

The Bucking Mules

Old-time music is a world unto itself, though perhaps that's true of any kind of music. Certainly Mariachi is a world unto itself as well, I guess. In any case, stepping into it is a bit like stepping into a very large room, one furnished differently than any other.

Joseph Decosimo is one of the people who lives in that room, even if his name isn't as well-known as some of the others there. Like the best of them he's gotten his hands a bit dirty, digging in, meeting the players and tracing the paths of the tunes through the culture. He's also completing an academic thesis on sound technologies, music learning, and the aesthetics in old-time music.

There's an amiable obsessiveness to all of it. At age 16, when other boys his age weren't perhaps prone to be hanging out with senior citizens, Decosimo started visiting and learning from Charlie Acuff, one of the greats. Acuff died in 2013 at the age of 93, and it was like a library had burned—when the old-time greats pass on they take so much with them.

"He was incredibly patient with this banjo player who had some ability but didn't really know his way around the music. I felt welcomed in," Decosimo recalls, "I really wanted to understand what the music sounded like and felt like in the place where I was growing up. ... I wanted to create some sort of coherent sense of place through sound and through story."

"When I started going to visit Charlie Acuff it created a desire just to get into this thing more deeply. And not merely develop as a musical, with mind-blowing chops or something, but to develop along the lines that would somehow appeal to the people that I admired. To have one of these players say 'You've done well with this.'"

The Bucking Mules is Decosimo's band, and the members share his obsession in all the right ways. The liner notes for "Smoke Behind the Clouds," the band's second and recent release, are a geek-fest, including detailed notes as well as banjo and fiddle tunings with each track. "That's just the world of old-time music dorkiness." The tunings nudge players in the right direction, given that they aren't standardized. But it's more than that, too. "The creativity isn't just in the tunes alone," says Decosimo. "People are figuring these really fascinating ways to get at certain sounds. ... I think that's one of the most beautiful things about this genre."

It truly, is, both the sounds and the people figuring them out. He believes that the tunes, "are conversations. If we've done it right you'll hear our friendships." It's different, taking up bigger ideas and charting itself over a longer arc. It's not for everyone, rather it is everyone. If you listen closely, you might hear yourself in there, too.

— By Glen Herbert





Valerie June

She found a role model in Mavis Staples and inspiration in the archives of Alan Lomax.

By Roger Levesque

Whether you catch her on record, onstage, or on the telephone, it's hard to mistake the singular voice and personality of Valerie June.

Listening to her solo albums *Pushin' Against A Stone* (2013) and *The Order Of Time* (2017, both on Concord Records) introduces you to the Tennessee-born singer, songwriter, and strummer and the breadth of blues, soul, folk, and bluegrass that she weaves into her rootsy sound. But seeing her on the Edmonton Folk Music Festi-

val's main stage this past summer fronting an eight-piece band was something else. Speaking with her from her New York flat two days later filled in some of the blanks.

At first glance, June's stage show spoke to popular consumption from the band's tight meters and polished horn arrangements to the singer's own shiny garb. But her presence seemed to float over top, feeling less calculated, more ethereal and off the cuff.

In various corners her constricted, nasal-sounding voice has been compared to Billie Holiday, Hazel Dickens, Amy Winehouse, or Dolly Parton. June's spontaneous moves dance to all the textures and grooves as she flings around a mass of dreadlocks like some carefree anti-Medusa with her own benevolent spell. She can play acoustic, electric, and lap-steel guitars, banjo and ukulele, but it's her delivery—poised

between childlike naivete one moment and aged wisdom the next—that grabs your attention.

"I don't believe that singers only have one voice. Your voice changes over the course of a day. I just happen to like the playground of all the different voices that we have."

At 35, June feels she's just hitting her stride but she's paid some dues working her share of day jobs and cafe corners along the way. That may help explain the arresting old-is-new atmosphere of her tunes, or her hope and faith in the humanity she sings for.

"I wear shiny clothes to remind you to shine," she told the crowd in her southern twang. "Everybody's got a light inside."

Valerie June Hockett was born in Jackson, TN, and grew up in Humboldt before making it to Memphis in her late teens. The

oldest of five siblings, she is a daughter of music promoter Emerson Hockett, who once publicized the tours of Prince, Bobby Womack, and others (he also sang guest backup with two of June's brothers on *The Order Of Time* before his passing in 2016).

June's initial inspiration came from singing gospel in church in Humboldt as a kid.

"That's the foundation," she explains, "the starting place. I say that because there are so many influences and inspirations and artists that I respect, but it always takes me back to the church I started singing in every Sunday and every Wednesday for 18 years of my life."

She still 'listens' for those voices when she's sorting out parts or characters in a song.

"I write based off the voice that I hear inside. Maybe it's a bluesy black man's voice so I'm writing that, or I'll hear a high childlike voice and I'm writing that to sound magical and light-hearted. If the voice that I heard sounded country, I'm singing it like it's country. I play what I receive and the music just goes where it wants to go."

She thanks her father for two kinds of musical lessons.

"He had music going around the house 24 hours a day—it drove my mother crazy—but the greatest influence I got came from seeing him working, organizing shows, reaching out to managers, showing me how to promote my art. So when I moved to Memphis I knew how to put together a press kit for my first demo, and I was brave enough to walk into the newspapers and tell them to listen to my stuff."

When it comes to social commentary, she calls Mavis Staples "a role model" but June is there to serve her characters and story first. A great, influential source of stories came with her discovery of the Alan Lomax recording archives.

"I've always loved voices and layers of voices, so when I heard the music that Lomax had captured it was just like the music I grew up hearing in church except with instruments. That opened the door for me to dig deeper. Studying that music is how I became my own person and learned about the artists I respected."

Listening and learning to strum in her teens and twenties, June was a young person mesmerized by old music. Her brief

marriage and first performances came in the duo Bella Sun before a move to Memphis in 2000 led to further collaborations. There was her solo debut with Broken String Collective, an EP with Nashville's Old Crow Medicine Show, and she was a featured artist on MTV. But her career really took off with another move, to Brooklyn in 2011, and a meeting with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys.

Auerbach co-produced her strikingly eclectic label debut *Pushin' Against A Stone*, co-composing five tracks with guest Booker T. Jones co-writing another. It was

"I feel like I'm a magical spirit who came into this human body."

the first album to really show what June could do, drawing international attention.

In contrast, *The Order Of Time* breathes with a dreamy sense of space that lets you feel that southern heat, produced this time by multi-instrumentalist Matt Marinelli (bassist in her live band). They met at the 2014 Newport Folk Festival where he was working for friend Norah Jones—who also guests on two tracks. A trio of New York horns, touring pals Andy MacLeod (guitar) and Pete Remm (keys) and others join in to support the alternately casual or intense

delivery that June brings to a dozen original songs she dubs "organic moonshine roots music".

"In the studio together, it was kind of like working in circles around the instruments, thinking, 'I hear this' or 'I hear that' and picking up stuff and doing it. Usually we're just a five-piece band live. I've always wanted to do this (Edmonton) festival but I wanted to do it with the full band. The horns add a loose, energetic flavour that opens up all the doors."

Arranger Doug Wieselmann lives in her apartment building while her saxophonist

on tour, Matt Bauder, is another neighbourhood friend. June guesses she spent most of the past five years on the road but when she is at home the music scene is creatively stimulating.

Despite her New York address, living in the city hasn't changed the role that nature and spirituality still play in the singer's life. Now she waters more than 100 plants in her tiny back-patio herb garden to bring solace from the city.

"I'm not really a religious person but spirituality is definitely a part of what I do. When voices come to me they're coming from a spiritual place, just voices out there in the ether. I feel like I'm a magical spirit who came into this human body. I know that the only way the world changes is in small acts of friendship and kindness, in small growths like a seed."



kulele lady: Valerie June



Birds of Chicago

They call their music secular gospel—an addictive, earth-bound form of spiritualism.

By Eric Volmers

Birds of Chicago are proof that two very different upbringings can lead to a life in music.

Singer/songwriter JT Nero grew up in Ohio in an academic household. His parents were both professors of English lit at the University of Toledo. They also had a massive record collection in which young JT, who was born Jeremy Lindsay, was free and encouraged to immerse himself, giving him an early and broad overview of old country, soul, and classic rock.

“I always assumed I was going to be a writer of some sort,” Nero says. “When I decided to take the songwriter path, it was just a little bit of a left turn.”

His wife, Allison Russell, on the other hand grew up in a strict household in Montreal. While her mother and grandmother were singers and musicians, her stepfather cut her off from pop culture of any sort. She ran away at 14 and discovered a whole new world. She dove in, teaching herself banjo and clarinet and developing a striking vocal style equally suited for gospel exuberance as it is mournful soul.

“She had a big awakening,” Nero said. “Part of that discovery was to come back to the music that was in her. I think for being deprived of it, she was that much more voracious in consuming it once she was free.”

It’s probably a little too simplistic to suggest that the two distinct experiences in discovering music—Nero’s being long and studious and Russell’s explosive and visceral—completely define their respective roles in Birds of Chicago. But whatever the case, they have found a natural chemistry that can be heard in live shows and on the duo’s joyful but assured Joe Henry-produced sophomore disc, *Real Midnight*.

Both had successful musical careers before coming together, he as a singer/songwriter in Chicago under the name JT and the Clouds and she as a member of the Canadian roots ensemble Po’ Girl. Birds of Chicago, Nero says, was the result of a “long, friendly merger” and a relationship that evolved from mutual fandom to musical collaboration to husband and wife.

They first met in 2004 when Nero hosted Russell’s band in Chicago as part of its first U.S. tour. In 2007, Po’ Girl began covering Nero’s song *‘Til It’s Gone* and invited him to open up for them in Europe.

“I went and just opened solo and Alli would come out and sing with me,” Nero says. “The musical connection happened and then the romance bloomed. We thought we were being really slick and that nobody knew the romance was happening. It’s funny, we tried to fight that part of it off for quite awhile because we knew there was such a musical connection there and we were both scared of screwing that up. That went on for awhile. It wasn’t until 2012 that

we really came to our senses; that we had to carve out time for this thing that was happening for us musically.”

Part of it was a realization from Nero that he had begun writing songs with Russell’s voice in mind.

“I found I was internalizing her voice and that new songs would present themselves as obvious songs Alli should sing,” Nero says. “I was hearing her voice from the jump. That was another kind of signal to us that there was something substantial happening.”

Birds of Chicago formed in 2012 and released a self-titled debut. By 2013, Nero and Russell were married. On *Real Midnight*, it’s easy to see how Russell’s expressive voice became such a powerful muse for Nero, helping push his catchy folk songwriting into deeper wells of soul, R&B, and blues.

She possesses formidable vocal chops that can be applied with equal effectiveness to the soaring gospel choruses of *Remember Wild Horses* and *Estrella Goodbye*, the chill Fleetwood Mac-ish dream-pop of *Colour of Love* and a capella blues hollering of *Barley*, which Russell wrote about her grandmother.

When it came time to record a followup to their debut, Joe Henry topped the list as their producer of choice. Not only were they fans of the wide range of songs the North Carolina native had written for his own solo records over the years, they were particularly drawn to his production work behind a number of great female vocalists.

That included albums with Bettye LaVette and, in particular, Over the Rhine, a husband-and-wife duo from Ohio with similar folk and roots leanings.

“It’s the way his musicians and his production has a similar ethic as we do of carving out a righteous space, a packet for the vocal to breathe in,” Nero says. “You can really hear that room. The room becomes like another player in the band.”

And not unlike Henry’s own work, the Birds of Chicago defy easy categorization when it comes to genre. So Nero and Russell have taken to calling what they do “secular gospel”.

“For us, I guess it’s sort of an earth-bound spiritualism,” Nero says. “The point of gospel music, in all religions, is to get you closer to God. The more beauty you conjure up, the nearer thou art to God. For us, it’s just about the way we connect with other humans and connect in a way that is raw and spiritual. It’s a connection that we acknowledge we can’t get in any other human transaction and that’s just a drug that keeps us coming back. for sure.”

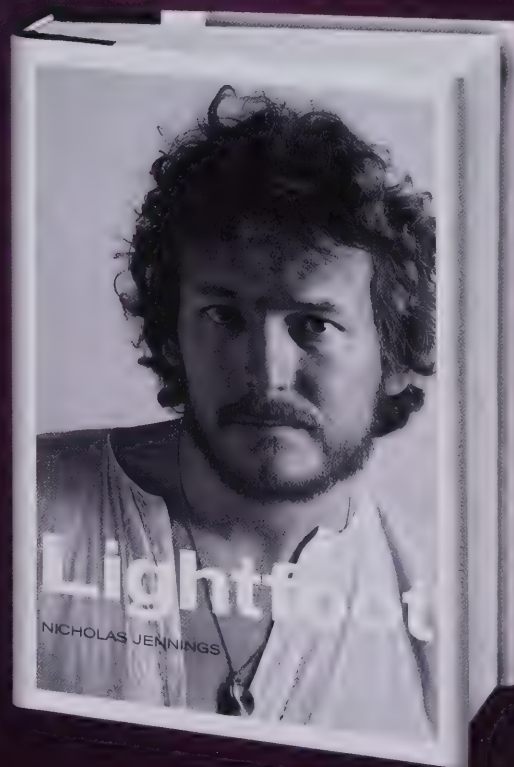
Three and a half years ago, Russell gave birth to the couple’s first child, a daughter named Ida Maeve, who now accompanies them on tour.

It has certainly given life on the road a new dimension for the pair. Nero says that he and his wife suffer the same anxieties as all first-time parents and that touring has become a somewhat calming force in their lives.

“She’s our first kid, so we’re getting our asses handed to us in one way or another,” Nero says. “For us, touring and that life is something we know how to do. And I think if we had tried getting off the road and being non-nomadic people we would have been even more lost.”

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Abigail Lapell

She cloaks her songs in layers of mystery stained with hues of weird traditional folk.
By Pat Langston

Do you remember the G20 summit protests in Toronto in 2010? Granted, we've had lots of protests over the years, but this one, meant to draw attention to poverty and the depredations of unchecked capitalism, was noteworthy for resulting in the largest mass arrest in Canadian history: 1,000 people.

Toronto singer/songwriter Abigail Lapell remembers the event and has written about it to strong effect in *Hostage Town* on her sophomore album *Hide Nor Hair*. The song, with its opening line, "I'm trying to find my friends / Swallowed up by the streets again" and its shifting meter, isn't about the social justice goals of the protests so much as it is about the dislocation she experienced that

day.

"We'd come together in a moment of solidarity but ended up feeling alienated," says Lapell, who was not among those arrested. She says that protestors can sometimes be cliquish, and she and others wound up feeling left out.

"You're trying to find your people, your tribe. We were like tourists wandering through this surreal landscape and not feeling super-connected to it."

Hostage Town is about a specific event but is the kind of song everyone can relate to, a song about that moment when you suddenly feel alone because you've realized the people you're with have purposes quite unlike yours.

It's also the kind of impressionistic, melodically complex song that Lapell does so well. Concerned less with narrative and more with creating a sense of place, experience, and emotion, she finds that melody usually arrives unbidden whereas lyrics can be a struggle—a good reason for using lyrics as she does, as a series of concrete

images that help anchor her melodically evocative songs.

That use of lyrics also accords with her wariness about too much self-revelation in music. She may start out wanting to convey her own sadness in a song's lyrics but, "I end up shrouding it in layers of imagery. I set out to write honestly, but sometimes being earnest is too cheesy."

These sorts of songwriting principles help pin together *Hide Nor Hair*. However, Lapell was surprised to find, only after the album was finished, that there's another thread running through many of the songs. It's that of coming and going, she says, noting references in songs to sailboats or the passenger side of a car. She wrote the record over a number of years when she was often in transit and without a permanent home, and that's wound up surfacing in many of the songs.

Lapell grew up in the Toronto suburb of North York, playing open mic nights in Toronto's popular Kensington Market when she was older, but then spent several years

in Montreal starting in the early 2000s. There she pursued cultural studies at Concordia University, played in indie rock bands, and basked in the vibrant indie music scene—think Arcade Fire, for example—that helped define the city for a time.

She then moved to Hamilton, ON, for a master's degree in critical theory and cultural studies at McMaster University. She considered further studies but concluded that they weren't likely to lead to a prosperous career. So she decided, "If I'm going to be hustling and not making much money, I may as well be a musician."

It's turning out to have been a wise choice. The new album—her debut *Great Survivor* was released in 2011—reveals fresh elements with every listen, and the track *Jordan* won the Colleen Petersen Songwriting Award in 2016.

That song was also written while away from home on a writing retreat in a small cabin in a Michigan forest. A little river called the Jordan runs through the forest and inside the cabin was a beat-up old piano. She picked out the melody on the piano's few working keys, the first song she'd ever composed on a piano even though she'd studied the instrument as a youngster.

The result is a slightly mysterious, hopeful tune anchored by deep piano chords and with thundering horses, the forest, and allusions to the biblical Jordan River coursing through it.

Images of nature appear elsewhere on *Hide Nor Hair*. Mountains, desert, and the sea, the three joined by a highway, underpin the brooding *Flag Song*, which she says was inspired by a flag she spotted when visiting the Kingdom of Jordan. She was told the

flag held the Guinness record for being the biggest in the world. That claim tickled her. "How do they know there isn't a bigger flag somewhere?" she asks with the logical scepticism that one senses behind many of her songs.

Lapell's fondness for nature, if not for large flags, comes from her years of living in cities. "Now I spend as much time as I can out in the country. I feel like being in the woods is good for your mental health. Most of life is in a grid, but out there, there are no right angles, no straight lines. Being in a place where there's all jagged edges is very pleasing to me."

Jagged edges is a good description of what goes on in some of Lapell's songs. Trying to assign a genre to her music is a mug's game, but there sometimes arises a strain of traditional folk in her songs. It happens in the opening track, *Diamond Girl*, although it seems more a matter of attitude and, briefly, phrasing, and if you listen too hard it's gone. It crops up elsewhere as well, albeit fleetingly, more a tantalizing accent than anything.

"I've been exposed to a lot of traditional stuff over the past few years," she says. "It's dark and edgy and cool, not the kind of mainstream folk music with pretty harmonies and clever lyrics and all the stuff I don't like."

What she does like is what she hears in old "British Isles ballads where one jarring or dissonant change comes in and throws the whole thing into this weird territory."

Little wonder she felt compelled to commit the unexpected territory of that G20 summit protest to song.



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Jay Andrews

From drumming in a pipe band to remixing and sampling the Celts, meet the DJ Sticks.

By Eric Volmers

It's fun to picture the recording session that produced *Hurricane*, the final track on *Shreem – Celtic Remixing*.

It's one of the few on the album where all the stylistically far-flung principal players involved were in the same room at the same time, huddled together in a Halifax studio. That included Norman Adams, the principal cellist of Symphony Nova Scotia and head of the experimental chamber

music outfit suddenly Listen Music. Halifax beatboxer Eric McIntyre, a.k.a. EMC, was also on hand, as were sister duo Cassie and Maggie MacDonald. The latter's Celtic piano-and-fiddle stomper *Hurricane Jane* was actually the bedrock of the track. EMC adds some beatboxing, Adams offers some haunting avant-garde cello.

And overseeing it all was Jay Andrews, the 27-year-old percussionist, producer, and DJ behind *Shreem*, who somehow managed to wrangle all these seemingly clashing elements into one exhilarating, tempo-shifting, genre-hopping track.

"That's a busy song," says Andrews, in an interview from his home in Toronto. "It took awhile to put that one together. I love that track. It was fun to do. For that one,

we were all in the studio together. Halifax is kind of small. If you're in music, you're going to cross paths somewhere downtown at some point."

But while *Hurricane* may be a nice tribute to Halifax's eclectic music community, it also illustrates Andrews's ability to explore new frontiers for traditional Celtic music, which is a genre that, by its very definition, doesn't tend to evolve at a rapid pace.

The cover art for *Celtic Remixing* features the bushy-haired Andrews bathed in green light, with a four-leaf clover on his T-shirt. Depending on which definition you go by, the word *shreem* itself is either an ancient term referencing the mantra of Hindu goddess Lakshmi or, according to the Urban Dictionary, the female form of bro that is "used to identify a chill girl".

For the record, Andrews named the project after the former, but seems to find the modern, less-spiritual meaning just as intriguing.

"I don't think I've ever seen that definition," he says with a laugh. "I'm going to look it up, though."

The idea of messing with tradition had been percolating in Andrews's mind for quite some time, dating back to his pre-teen days as a drummer in a traditional pipe band. The Halifax native, who recently moved to Toronto, may be best known for his work remixing Ashley MacIsaac's songs, which eventually led to him co-producing the veteran musician's 2016 dance-Celtic mashup *FDLR*.

MacIsaac discovered Andrews in an online video, where the musician was performing under his DJ-percussionist persona Sticks. MacIsaac, already known for his unconventional twist on Celtic music, was looking to incorporate electronic and dance beats into his next record. Initially, he was only looking for a DJ and wasn't aware of Andrews's interest in Celtic music.

"It was kind of odd, he didn't know I played cajon or played with Celtic artists at all," says Andrews. "He mentioned the idea of wanting to do this record and I said, 'Well, I've already started messing with this stuff'. It was just a coincidence and it just went from there."

Andrews began DJing when he was 18, but his roots in traditional music go back even farther. He was only seven when he first became interested in pipe band drum-

ming and began taking lessons.

"I just really loved playing drums," he says. "It was at Citadel Hill, which is like a re-enactment site in Halifax. They have a band and you can work there for the summer. So I started doing that when I was nine."

By the age of 14, he was touring as a member of the 78th Highlanders Halifax Citadel, which found him competing in three World Pipe Band Championships.

"I was always around Celtic music," he says. "But I've always had this interest in doing something different with it. Even when I was playing in pipe bands I was trying to write different drum scores and had some different ideas that I really wanted to come at but I wasn't sure how. When I was 18, I started DJing and doing mashup music as Sticks. It just came full circle. I thought it was a good opportunity to start messing with this."

So *Celtic Remixing* takes traditional tunes and reels and adds an assortment of loops, samples, and beats. On the banjo-fuelled

Wide Awake, Andrews uses the traditional Irish reel *Road To Monalea* as a starting point while St. Lucian-born, Halifax-based rapper Kayo adds a hip-hop spin.

Steps incorporates elements of *Song of the Chanter* and *Green Fields of Canada*, among others, with beatbox work of both Andrews and EMC and the haunting pipes of Jeremy Keddy, who was actually Andrews's first snare drum teacher back in his pipe band days.

"It comes down to the idea that it's all music, really," Andrews says. "The fusion of styles seems to overpower that idea of different genres. We look more at the emotion of the track and mood of the track rather than it being a Celtic song or not being a Celtic song or being a hip-hop song or not being a hip-hop song."

At the beginning of *Steps*, there is a sample of a speaker who can be heard talking about "resistance to change" over top the mournful pipes, just before a hip-hop beat takes the tune into a different direction. When asked if the sample was some sort

of comment on the Celtic traditionalists who disapprove of musicians messing with the form, Andrews laughs but remains diplomatic.

"It could reference that," he says. "All my samples could mean a bunch of things, I guess. I don't think resistance is necessarily bad. It's just people's opinions, which is fine. There is often resistance to change in anything. But when you're trying to flip traditional music, I think there is some resistance. It just opens the door for more conversation, which is good."

Besides, there may be more overlap than people think between hip-hop, EDM, and Celtic. At a summer gig in Toronto's trendy Kensington Market, Shreem shared the bill with hip-hop and R&B acts.

"The hip-hop fans who were there really liked it," Andrews says. "There were some Celtic fans there as well. It's quite a wide range. It reaches to a lot of different people. There are a lot of older people who are really interested in it as well, which is probably one of the more surprising things for me."

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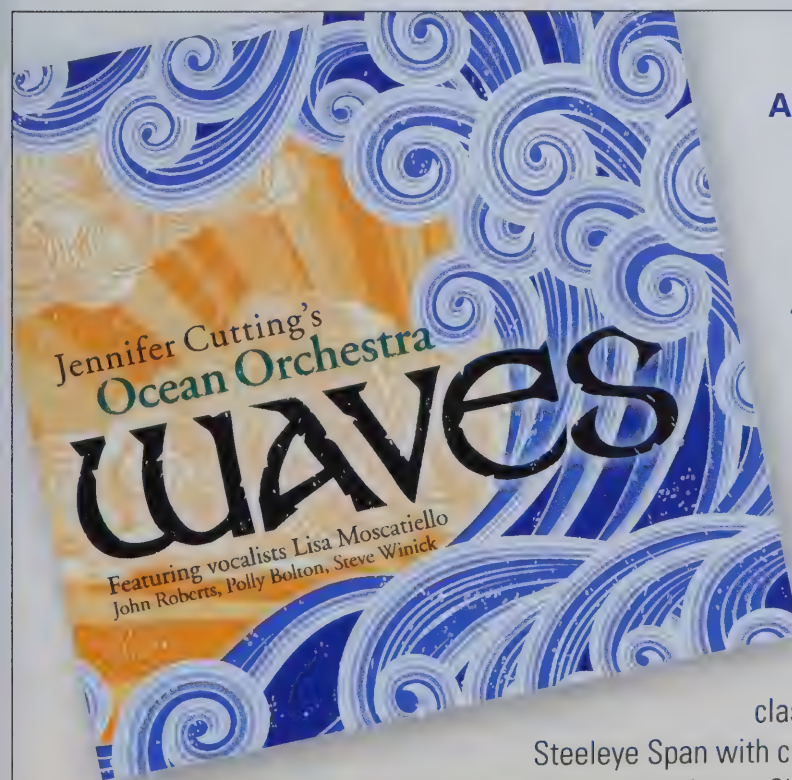
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From the capital of traditional Québécois song, this quintet revel in their heritage.

By Yves Bernard

For the past 27 years, outstanding artists Gaston Lepage and Serge Thériault have been singing together at the helm of Hommage aux Aînés, a traditional ensemble specializing in call-and-response songs. With six albums to their name, they have gained a cult following in Quebec's Lanaudière region, singing like the people of the province's traditional song capital, Saint-Côme, have sung for generations.

"Pretty much all of the families in Saint-Côme sing call-and-response songs at their get-togethers. We were exposed to it when we were young, and we never let it go. In the 1960s, kids would sing in the school bus

on the way to school," remembers Gaston.

The phenomenon is so alive and well that it has inspired others. In 2008, the Mémoires et Racines festival designated Saint-Côme as the capital of traditional Québécois song. The town's municipal council even provided a legal status to this expression of its heritage by identifying "the practice of singing traditional songs as an important element of its heritage and identity."

Why has this heritage been so well preserved in Saint-Côme, a village in the Lanaudière region that fluctuates between 1,500 and 2,000 inhabitants? Perhaps because it is located at the end of a road? Whatever the reason, many artists have emerged from Saint-Côme: Baqqhus, Légende, La Giroflée, Les Trois B, and La Galvaude, to name but a few. Brothers Éric Beaudry from De Temps Antan and Simon Beaudry from Le Vent du Nord also hail from the village.

The people of Saint-Côme sing as much today as they did in the past, but can the

same be said for the neighbouring villages?

"There's quite a bit of singing in Sainte-Béatrix, and a lot around Sainte-Marie-Salomé. Saint-Jacques is made up of Acadian families, like in the Saint-Côme area," answers Gaston.

But who are these families?

"Marc Brien was from Sainte-Marie-Salomé, and he had a solid repertoire. The Laportes are in Saint-Liguori. Pierre and Rémie Laporte are well-known musicians from that family."

Serge Thériault, also present for the interview, adds: "The Cantin family are from the same area, and they're all musicians." One of its most famous members, the late Gilles Cantin, played with both Hommage aux Aînés and La Bottine Souriante, among others. The Mémoire et Racines festival's main stage is now named after him.

As for Serge, many of his main musical influences can be traced back to his family. "All of my father's cousins sang. My father sang, too, but he died fairly young. He was from Saint-Côme. I didn't sing much

growing up, but at one point I started going to parties and that's when it started."

Who were his other influences?

"Jean-Louis, Gilles, and Aurèle Thériault. After them, Gilles Cantin made a big impression on us. He was the one who got traditional music going in our area with La Bottine. Besides them, there were many others, like the Bordeleau family, and even in Gaston's immediate family, there was more singing than in mine."

Gaston Lepage chimes in: "In my family, there's music on both sides. The Lepages are musicians, while the Gagnés are mostly singers. I've been singing call-and-response songs since I was little. When I started playing traditional dance music, as soon as we'd finished dancing, we'd go to somebody's house and sing for the rest of the night. It's still like that in Saint-Côme. My children sing, Serge's granddaughter sings, and Jean-François Branchaud's children have started singing."

Jean-François Branchaud has now replaced Micheal Bordeleau in the band. He is both a singer and a fiddler who also plays the piano and is adept at podorythmie. He

sometimes sits in for pianist Louise Lepage but, for the most part, he makes use of his other talents.

Has Branchaud's arrival significantly changed the group's sound?

"Absolutely not. All that's changed are the songs that he sings," replies Gaston.

There's little surprise in that. In a 2014 interview with *Penguin Eggs*, Michel Bordeleau explained the group's style: "In recent years, there have been young players like Danny Baillargeon and Simon Riopel who have played with us, but the instrumentation has never really changed. It's always been guitar and piano-based. Despite the years that pass and the changing lineups, there has been continuity in the group, and a certain way of doing things has remained. It's about call-and-response songs. In most bands, there's a mix of instrumental numbers and songs, but in ours, the instruments are there to serve the songs, and not the other way around."

In the beginning, *Hommage aux Aînés* focused mainly on older songs from Saint-Côme, as can be heard on their first albums. When the band learned a song, they tried

to reproduce the original by changing it as little as possible.

Years later, even though songs from Saint-Côme still feature predominately on their albums, they have integrated other songs from major traditional voices such as Jean-Paul Guimond, Madame Rose-Aimée Bouchard, and her son, Alphonse Morneau, among others.

Hommage aux Aînés released their sixth album, *En rappel*, in 2016. Serge describes it: "It's made up of songs that we would play as encores during our shows. People would ask us what albums they were from, but they hadn't been recorded."

En rappel features songs such as *Les prisons de Londres*, *Deux Paris*, *L'horloge* and *Souffrance*, as well as 14 other songs that are fairly well known in Quebec's traditional song world.

For the most part, they're interpreted in the local, Saint-Côme style. In the near future, *Hommage aux Aînés* plans to release their first album featuring Jean-François Branchaud. It seems safe to say that they will remain true to the spirit that they've been portraying for the past three decades.

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Ken Colyer Skiffle Group: Ken Colyer, Alexis Korner, Lonnie Donegan, Bill Colyer and Chris Barber

Roots, Radicals and Rockers

Billy Bragg's new book explores the '50s skiffle boom in the U.K. and how it popularized the guitar and led to bands like The Beatles.

By Tony Montague

Billy Bragg wasn't around when skiffle groups were the rage across Britain—he was born in 1957, coincidentally the year of 'peak skiffle'. But that doesn't prevent him from getting under the skin of the acoustic guitar-led music and its mainly teenage musicians, or understanding its rich significance for popular culture, then and after.

As Bragg argues in his recently published *Roots, Radicals and Rockers*, being a young punk two decades later in 1977 gave him valuable insights and perspectives on *How Skiffle Changed The World*—to quote the book's subtitle. That's a big claim to make but he proves it convincingly.

The skiffle story in Britain begins not with blues or jug bands, according to Bragg, but with trad jazz—a black American-based, New Orleans-inspired retro style that was a reaction against swing jazz. It became hugely popular in Britain, thanks to musicians such as Ken Colyer, Humphrey Lyttleton, Chris Barber, and Acker Bilk.

"Because trad was the scene just before guitar rock there was always an adversarial element in that relationship, underscored I think by the fact that by the early '60s, when guitar rock is starting to dominate in U.K. youth culture and the R&B scene in particular, trad jazz clubs like the Marquee and the 100 Club in London, and the Cavern in Liverpool, would not allow electric instruments.

"You've got to give credit to the trad jazzers, however, because

their appreciation of black roots music and their reaction against the mainstream is key to how skiffle appears and breaks the relationship between the charts and Tin Pan Alley—briefly, only briefly, for 18 months. But in the same way punk was a rejection of stadium rock, and all that shit, the impulse of the trad jazzers was to get back to basics."

Trad jazz started in the U.S. and by the late '40s reached England, where Ken Colyer and friends fell in love with the unvarnished and gritty music they heard only on old records, as due to a musicians' union ban at the time no American artists were allowed to tour in the U.K.

"Because these recordings were made on rudimentary equipment in the '20s, the musicians had to blow unusually hard on their brass instruments—20 years later, the young Brits thought that was how you played trad jazz normally. After half an hour their lips went numb, so in order not to lose their audience they put down their instruments and picked up acoustic guitar, washboard, and double bass, and played broadly what we might refer to as Lead Belly's repertoire."

Cornet and trumpet player Colyer and others at first called these 'breakdown sessions', and they became increasingly popular. His musically knowledgeable brother, Bill Colyer, dubbed it 'skiffle'—an African-American slang for a 'rent party'—after Dan Burley & his Skiffle Boys, who released *Skiffle Blues* in 1946.

"Skiffle is one of those words that means something different on either side of the Atlantic—like pants, or football, or socialism. Bill turned it into a subgenre of American roots music played in the U.K. If he'd said he and his brother were playing the blues they'd have been laughed out of London, because people back then believed it was impossible for white guys to play blues."

But Ken Colyer had tasted blues and trad jazz first hand. The



The Quarrymen skiffle group: John Lennon second from left.



Billy Bragg

epic tale of how he joined the Merchant Navy to reach New Orleans, stayed there playing with the black masters, was arrested for over-staying his visa, got thrown into prison and later deported, is one of the delights of *Roots, Radicals and Rockers*.

"When he gets back to England, who else will be able to sing Lead Belly songs with the authority of a man who's been in jail in Louisiana? He becomes the trad jazz Moses, and the authenticity he brings back allows him to have breakdown sessions as an integral part of what trad jazz bands do. Ken Colyer was never able to read music—at first he didn't even know when he was changing key. It's pretty punk rock stuff, really—like me and my dear friend Wiggy next door, who used to tune up to records so at least we were in some kind of tuning."

Colyer's original jazz band included a mercurial banjo player with a cheeky grin and penetrating voice—Lonnie Donegan. After Colyer left, the outfit now Chris Barber's Jazz Band, showcased Donegan. "Arguably the best white blues singer Britain produced before the '60s. Nobody had the energy or ability to deliver the song with the same power. If you listen to him singing *Rock Island Line*, the velocity is incredible. He was a new phenomenon."

Moreover, Donegan burst onto the scene playing a guitar—an instrument little heard in the U.K.—and usually accompanied by washboard and homemade tea-chest bass. *Rock Island Line* became a massive hit almost overnight—launching thousands of teenage skiffle groups from Barking to Belfast, playing guitars, banjos, and homemade, improvised instruments.

"There's a bit in the book where [The Who's] Pete Townsend witnesses the guitarist come from the rhythm section in the back of the jazz band to the front to take control of the skiffle session, and Pete realizes this is the future—that the music of his father, who played in a big band called The Squadronaires, is finished. He actually says to me, 'I knew I was going to get one of these guitars, and it was

"BILLY BRAGG ROOTS, RADICALS AND ROCKERS



HOW SKIFFLE CHANGED THE WORLD

going to be bye-bye, old man'.

"Donegan goes out on tour in 1956 around the variety halls, bearing the most revolutionary message ever heard by British youth—one, you don't have to be a

trained musician to make music; and two, you don't have to be an American to sing American songs."

Though relatively few skiffle recordings were made, they proved highly influential. "There's Donegan's repertoire—he was far and away the king of skiffle. The Vipers, who had a rhythm section that featured Wally Whyton, were like the skiffle Clash and had a hit with *Don't You Rock Me Daddy-O*. It became a clarion call to that first generation of British teenagers.

"Chas McDevitt and Nancy Whiskey have a hit both sides of the Atlantic with Libba Cotten's *Freight Train*, which the skiffles heard because Peggy Seeger was in London playing the coffee bars, so was Alan Lomax. Skiffle meant to the kids guitar-led music—it could be blues, or Donegan's music, gospel, English folk, cowboy songs."

With the skiffle craze, a new generation of teenagers, born during or just after the Second World War, cut their teeth as guitarists and performers—including all The Beatles, Cliff Richard, Gerry Marsden, Jimmy Page, David Bowie, Van Morrison, Roger Daltrey, as well as Martin Carthy. They went on to spearhead the pop and rock British Invasion of North America in the '60s and early '70s.

"Peak skiffle occurs on the sixth of July, 1957, when John Lennon's skiffle group The Quarrymen—who formed two weeks after Donegan came to Liverpool—are playing at Walton's church fete. Paul McCartney comes along, and they meet.

"That's it. Skiffle's done all it needs to do."



Rachel Baiman

A writer of pensive social songs in the tradition of Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard By Michael Dunn

Now living in Nashville, Chicago-born songwriter and fiddler Rachel Baiman has been steadily developing in traditional folk music, with both her new songwriting project and with her duo, 10 String Symphony. Baiman's sophomore release, *Shame*, was released earlier this year, and finds her pensive on a number of social issues.

"I wanted the freedom to say what I wanted to say," says Baiman. "I didn't have a 'brand' to begin with. Sometimes when you're in a band, you maybe shy away from certain things because you don't want to be speaking for everyone in the band, even if others in the band feel the same way. I can't tell any other artists what they ought to be doing, but I still feel artists have a respon-

sibility to work towards justice and make their voices heard.

"This was a unique situation; I'd written some songs that I wanted to put out, they felt really personal, and were different stylistically from 10 String Symphony, so I really wanted to make an album where the focus was on songwriting, and explore some different instrumentation. I've been able to stretch out and try some new things."

Baiman's time with 10 String Symphony has allowed her to refine her fiddle techniques, and while her roots in bluegrass are apparent throughout *Shame*, the album puts the focus on Baiman's vocals and writing, along with adding some understated, yet forward thinking Americana elements, as on *Take A Stand*, with a muddy electric guitar accented by clean, tremolo-inflected chord tones. Baiman says the openness to new sounds is another part of her changing expectations as she grows musically.

"I've been trying to let go of ego or expectations surrounding what should be on the record," Baiman says. "I grew up

playing the fiddle, and in the last few years focusing on songwriting, it's changed my perception of what 'good music' is. It's part of growing up, I think. You work and work and work to get technically good at something, and then you realize that no matter how good you get at it, that doesn't necessarily mean it's good music."

Baiman continues, "I feel like the album has a relatable, straightforward feel because I really didn't have any preconceived notions about how it was supposed to sound. If things weren't happening in a way that was musical, or weren't easy to feel, I would just reroute."

"We experimented a lot in the studio, and the arrangements came spontaneously. I didn't have the live band put together at that point, so there were no restrictions as to what we could do. Between that and the focus on the songwriting being very conversational and relatable, I think that's how it came to have a more relaxed feel."

Having been raised by parents who, as a social worker and a radical economist, were very active in socio-political spheres,

and having studied anthropology as her major at Vanderbilt, the thread of social and political themes flows naturally through Baiman's music.

While she does feel that artists have a responsibility to speak their minds in this particular era of America, she realizes it's not always easy for them to do so as it can affect their ability to get by.

"I don't fault anyone for being shy about speaking out as an artist, because it's incredibly tough to make a living. As an artist, it's easy to feel like, 'If we lose one festival, or one agency stops working with us,' that might be the difference between paying rent for them that month.

"I wouldn't tell anyone what to do with their music, but I do believe people have a responsibility to be aware, and speak up in whatever way that makes sense in their life."

Seeing the current divide in American public opinion is nothing new to Baiman, having been immersed in bluegrass most of her life while living in progressive cities such as Chicago and Nashville.

"Nashville's a very cosmopolitan city at this point; it's a young, progressive city full of artists, and I feel like people here are incredibly frustrated and scared. It's a benefit to me that I play bluegrass, which doesn't allow you to stay in your own bubble. Bluegrass appeals to a wide range of people, all with their own ideas.

"The South is a tough place. There's been a lot of hardship and poverty, and a lot of people have experienced it in different ways, so I don't think there's a lot of shock from a population that's dealt with a lot of these issues before, whereas people that are maybe living in Los Angeles or New York City maybe wonder where all this could be coming from.

"The forces that have combined to create this situation are terrifying, but I hope that it results in a restructuring of this country in a way that doesn't leave huge groups of people in this country out of the economic pool, and that's gonna take a lot of people looking at their mindset and making a lot of changes."

As for her music going forward, Baiman's focus is on growing her sound, and while her vocals might remind many of Gillian Welch, Baiman sees her vocal style as an extension of traditional folksinging, and is eager and excited to adapt it to new styles she may have overlooked earlier in her career.

"I came to Gillian Welch pretty late in the journey, to be honest. It's in the tradition of the old-time style, it's very straightforward, with an edge to it. I think Gillian Welch is steeped in that tradition, she's very much a contemporary writer of incredible, timeless folk ballads. I see it as part of the tradition of folksingers, like Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard.

"When I first started singing, I was just singing along to fiddle tunes, the call and response of square dance stuff. Now I'm hearing people like Margaret Glespy, who I love, and Courtney Barnett, whose records were a big influence on me in songwriting. And Hiss Golden Messenger. My musical journey is kind of backwards from most people. I grew up listening to only acoustic music and fiddle tunes, and now I'm 27 and I'm like, 'rock'n'roll is cool! Electric guitars are really cool, hip-hop is really cool!'"



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Northwest Passage

The Ocean Endeavor at Cape Hay, Nunavut

A look at the complexities of a classic folk song bound in myth by the Arctic waters. By David Newland

What's a singer/songwriter to do, when the audience demands That Song? It's a tough situation—especially when the song is *Northwest Passage*. The late Stan Rogers's a cappella anthem looms large over the Canadian canon, and even the Northwest Passage itself.

For the past five summers, I've travelled the Northwest Passage as an expedition host, Zodiac driver, and performer aboard ships. I help guide guests from around the world into the Arctic archipelago in seeking culture, wildlife, and wilderness.

It's an inspiring gig for a folksinger. Ian Tamblyn, who pioneered the form, has made several albums based on his travels: a vivid documentary of the Arctic experience.

Still, people ask him for That Song.

I've written enough material based on the lure and the lore of the Arctic to tour a show, *The Northwest Passage in Story and Song*. It's the most successful endeavour of my modest musical career. But the audience still wants That Song.

I sing it, of course. But I cannot sing That Song without considering its complexities—the first one being that it's not about the Northwest Passage.

The first verse makes it sound that way: "Westward from the Davis Strait, 'tis there 'twas said to lie / the sea-route to the Orient, for which so many died." But by verse two, our narrator is in less lofty latitudes, "driving hard across the plain". "Through the night, behind the wheel, the mileage ticking west," he navigates prairies and mountains "to race the roaring Fraser to the sea."

Producer Paul Mills tells a story about recording the album *Northwest Passage*, in a cottage near London, ON. They had finished the record, except for the title song, as yet uncreated. Paul told Stan they needed

it, pronto, and Stan stayed up through the night channelling something most of us could scarcely conceive of. He sang it over breakfast. The rest is history.

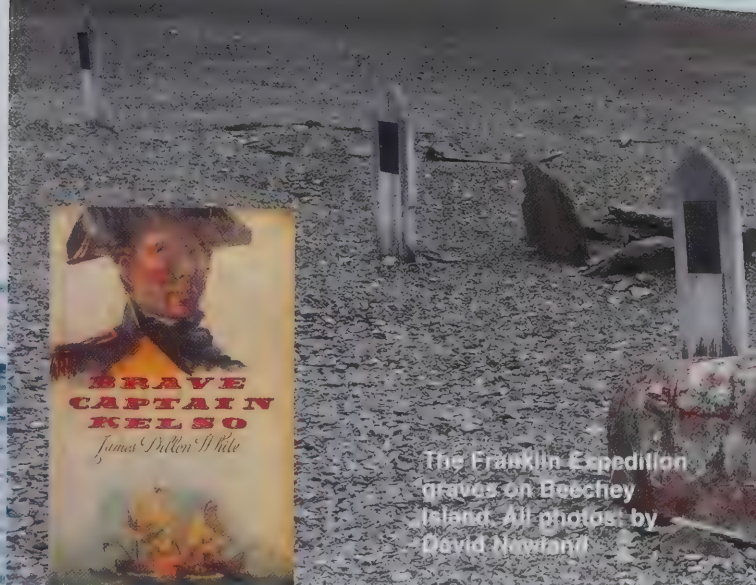
But *Northwest Passage* isn't a northern album. It's a western album, as much as *Fogarty's Cove* is an eastern album and *From Fresh Water* is about the Great Lakes. Songs such as *Field Behind the Plow* and *Night Guard* chronicle the travails of farmers and cowboys. Only the title track evokes the broken bones, the cairn of stone, and the Arctic's most celebrated failure, the search for the Northwest Passage.

A few explorers are name checked: (Alexander) McKenzie, David Thompson, "and the rest." There's also a mention of "brave Kelso"—a mistake of the pre-Google era. The explorer who crossed the plains in the 1600s was Kelsey; some deep digging online reveals that a brave "Captain Kelso" was the hero of a series of early 20th century adventure books for boys. Stan likely mixed them up. (I sing Kelsey, for the record.)

But it's the image of Sir John Franklin,



d Newland



The Franklin Expedition graves on Beechey Island. All photos by David Newland

reaching for the Beaufort Sea, that lingers with the listener. Rogers could not have foreseen it, but Franklin has become especially resonant of late, with the discoveries of his ships, HMS Erebus in 2014 and Terror in 2016. In *Northwest Passage*, Franklin's epic journey coalesces and transcends the others, giving a single name to their collective quest: the search for the Northwest Passage.

I've visited locations throughout the passage, including the gravesites at Beechey Island, where four hapless English explorers lay buried for a 150 years. The hand of Franklin feels eerily present.

When Franklin's flagship, Erebus, was found—thanks in large part to the work of Inuk historian Louie Kamookak—the Prime Minister of the day, Stephen Harper, penned a special article in the *Globe and Mail*, in which he obliquely mentions That Song: "Sir John Franklin's story has inspired historians, singers, and writers," notes Harper, before going on to claim that the find helped somehow cement Canadian Arctic sovereignty. (It didn't.)

Later, Harper was on hand for a ceremony celebrating the Erebus find at the Royal Ontario Museum. The Royal Canadian Geographical Society presented medals to Kamookak and other members of the archeological team before a crowd of Arctic enthusiasts, ranging from authors and explorers to commodores and commanders. The Prime Minister's presence was welcome for some, uncomfortable for many. Troubadour James Keelaghan closed the ceremony with a rousing version of *Northwest Passage*. Harper sang along in full voice. We all did. That Song unites us.

In the *Stan Rogers Songbook*, Stan recalls an audience member blurting out that Northwest Passage was a "new national anthem"; it is now acclaimed as such. When CBC chose its Fifty Tracks, *Northwest Passage* was near the top. That Song speaks to us. And yet, the search for the Northwest Passage, by land or by sea, was an attempt to find a shortcut around Canada. Canada was in the way. The iconic can also be ironic.

Northwest Passage tells a humble human story: the folksinger drives west through the night. But the backdrop is mythical: "How then am I so different from the first men through this way?" What a bold, and yet what a futile claim, as the quest, in the end, reveals only "the road back home again."

It doesn't have to happen that way. The Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen made the first successful transit between the Davis Strait and the Bering Strait in 1903. Amundsen, unlike Franklin,

befriended the Inuit, whose know-how he recognized as essential to success. That Louie Kamookak hails from Gjoa Haven, the community founded by Amundsen and his Inuit collaborators, seems more than poetic. The Inuit had long made the passage between the straits—on ice.

Evalyn Parry, in her performance piece *To Live In the Age Of Melting*, turns the popular myth inside out, forefronting Lady Franklin, and "tracing one warm line", the heart of the Canadian condition. She chokes on the line about "a land so wide and savage." I do, too. Yes, savage, from the French *sauvage*, merely means wild. But we all know how that word has been used to wound. And the land is not savage to those who know it.

Myth intertwines with history and geography. That Song is the soundtrack of the ongoing efforts to find out the fate of Franklin, as well as a favourite among travellers who visit the Passage. In both endeavours, Inuit collaborators—absent from the song—are now profoundly present. The story evolves; the characters change and grow. That is how myths work.

That Song has a magnetism like that of the Arctic itself. Written by a Southern Ontarian who never saw the Northwest Passage, it nevertheless draws people North. In a post-modern twist, Nathan Rogers, son of Stan, fulfilled the folksinger role on a Passage trip in 2010. Aboard, he considered his father's legacy in conversations with the writer Kathleen Winter, a scribe in search of a bard. Her book based on the voyage, *Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage*, became a Canadian bestseller. Myths keep spawning stories.

That Song tells a great story. It's also a great song: a soaring melody, a haunting lyric, a powerful evocation. In its greatness are flaws, and in those flaws are reflected our own. We must continually reconsider the stories we tell, how we tell them, and what for. Will we again "crack the mountain ramparts"—only to ram the pipelines through?

The true legacy of *Northwest Passage* lies in the one warm line. I think of a melody, of a river, of a highway. I think of poets and painters and authors each tracing their own. I think of Louie Kamookak, weaving the threads of Inuit oral history back into the fabric of this impossible land, where they belong.

I think of That Song, and how I always wind up singing it. Ah, for just one time...



The Wailin' Jennys

Juno Award-winning trio celebrate 15 years together with an album of select covers.

By Jackie Bell

The Wailin' Jennys are celebrating. It's been 15 years since vocalists Ruth Moody and Nicky Mehta founded the group and they, along with the group's most recent member, Heather Masse, are marking the anniversary with a new album aptly entitled *Fifteen*.

Since the 2011 release of their Juno-award winning album, *Bright Morning Stars*, the Jennys have been expanding their creative, musical, and personal horizons. As of this year, they are all official road mamas, having met the challenge of taking their babies on tour with them. Mehta laughs about her early experiences on the road with her sound-engineer husband and their twin baby boys.

"It was crazy," she laughs. "We didn't sleep." Now that they're a bit older, Mehta's boys stay at home with dad when mom is on tour.

Thematically, Mehta says, "All of our albums have a strong heart sense—a lot of love in them...a sort of universal love. Usually, there's a questioning of our place in the world and the cosmos, and we're sending love out to people who are struggling through that process. I think with this album...there is more of a specific love for friends and family in it...maybe because we're all mothers now."

Wailin' Jennys' fans have long been asking for a cover album and the women responded by bringing favourite songs to *Fifteen*. Mehta says, "Everybody brought what they really loved." The album spans musical territory from the Baptist hymn *The Old Churchyard* and a Jennified version of Tom Petty's *Wildflowers*, to a stomp-and-clap version of Paul Simon's *Loves Me Like a Rock*. Many of the songs are accompanied by Richard Moody on viola and mandolin, Adam Dobres on electric and acoustic guitar, and Sam Howard on bass—none so beautifully as *The Valley* by Jane Siberry. Ruth Moody describes the song as "deep and compassionate...a spiritual anthem." She adds, "The boys dug deep in their performance...It was one of those things that came together magically."

Moody brought Emmylou Harris's *Boulder To Birmingham* to the album, saying, "I've loved this song for as long as I've loved songs—it's such a poignant and heartbreaking tribute to lost love. The fact that Emmylou wrote it after Gram Parsons's death makes it all the more meaningful."

The Jennys also included Dolly Parton's *Light of a Clear Blue Morning*, which resonates thematically with the rest of the album. It was already in their repertoire, as they'd been commissioned to record it for the 2011 Canadian film *The Year Dolly Parton Was My Mom*.

Also on the album is *Weary Blues from Waiting* by Hank Williams, one of the songs that brought the latest iteration of the band together. Moody and Mehta first met Masse in Philadelphia at World Cafe Live.

"We wanted to see how our voices blended, so we ducked into a public bathroom, locked the door and sang a few songs," Moody says. "I'm pretty sure we asked her to join the band right then and there."

Preparation for the new album required a little technology and a lot of creativity—Mehta lives in Winnipeg, Masse in the Catskills, and Moody is currently deciding where next to plant roots. "We arranged

everything over Skype,” Mehta says. “We sent recordings of ourselves doing the melodies and suggestions for harmonies. We met in Victoria a couple of days before the recording and arranged things properly. It’s amazing what you can do through necessity.”

“We think the album has a live, real, moment-in-time kind of feel to it,” Moody says. Indeed, much of the album was recorded live-off-the-floor, courtesy of engineer Joby Baker of Baker Studios. As with all of the Jennys’ recordings, the vocals are up front in the mix and the harmonies are seamless and melodic.

“After 15 years of doing this,” says Mehta, “you learn very quickly to match your phrasing and breaths.”

As well as juggling a new album, motherhood, touring, and recording with the band, the Jennys work on their own projects. A few years ago, Moody was playing a collaborative show with two members of Mark Knopfler’s band as part of Glasgow’s Celtic Connections. Out of the blue, she received an email from Knopfler inviting her to sing

on the recording he was just finishing.

“I was in disbelief at first,” she says. “I’m a big fan and, of course, I was very honoured.” A week later, she boarded an overnight train and found herself in London singing backup vocals on four tracks of Knopfler’s album *Privateering*. She has now sung on a couple of his albums, including being featured in the duet *Wherever I Go* on his 2015 album *Tracker*.

In 2013, Moody released a solo album, *These Wilder Things*, which includes a guest appearance by Knopfler on the track entitled *Pockets*. She took the Ruth Moody Band on tour to open for Knopfler, traveling with him throughout Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

“We were playing stadiums and the Royal Albert Hall. It was a lot of fun to be in that world for a little while. As much as it felt surreal, it felt very comfortable. He is such a gentleman and such a kind and supportive person,” she says.

Nicky Mehta is currently working with artist Kim Slezak on a children’s book based on the lyrics from her song *Away But*

Never Gone.

“The song talks about death,” Mehta says, “using nature images, the sun and the moon...the cycles of life. I’ve been told it would be good for grief work with kids.” She intends to self-publish the book early in 2018. A mental health advocate and former child welfare support worker, Mehta has taught songwriting to at-risk youth. When in the U.S., the Jennys work with the National Alliance for Mental Health and raise money for the organization through raffles at their concerts.

Heather Masse, who trained at the New England Conservatory of Music as a jazz singer, follows her jazz roots in her off time from the Jennys. In 2013, she released *Lock My Heart*, an album of jazz standards performed with pianist Dick Hyman. In 2016, she recorded *August Love Songs* with avant-garde jazz trombonist Roswell Rudd.

The Wailin’ Jennys bring a maturity and a wealth of new experience to *Fifteen*, which will be out in late October 2017. Their U.S. tour dates start Nov. 18 and the Canadian tour will happen in 2018.



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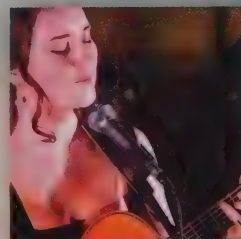
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Sarah Jane Scouten

One of the most versatile, and sometimes quirkiest, songwriters on the national scene.

By Tony Montague

On a hot, late-July evening on Vancouver's Main Street, the packed Fox Cabaret was buzzing like a hive as Sarah Jane Scouten took the stage with her band to a hometown crowd.

Born and raised on nearby Bowen Island, though currently living in Toronto, the roots-based singer and songwriter was back among old and new fans and family for the release party of *When The Bloom Falls From The Rose*, her third album.

Among the dancers in the audience was her mom, and sister Anna came up to help out with vocals on a couple of numbers.

Music plays a crucial role in Sarah Jane's immediate family. "My dad plays bluegrass.

My biological mother was really into show tunes and she'd write parodies of songs. She died giving birth to my brother in 1988, when I was almost two. Then my dad married Angela—who was at the show—and she's quite musical, more the dancing side of things. All three of us kids ended up being songwriters. My brother, Jacob, first, then Anna, and eventually me—the oldest, but I came to it last."

If any time was lost, Sarah Jane has been making up for it fast. And she's been playing music much longer.

"Angela's parents are Scottish—very Scottish. She gave me that identity, and I felt a need to compensate for not being as Scottish as my cousins or my sister. So my interest started in that, and morphed into bluegrass and Appalachian music through my dad."

Sarah Jane started piano and took vocal lessons early, and as a pre-teen taught herself guitar. "We used to go to the music camp in Sorrento [BC] for years, and when

they had old-time musicians there I would gravitate towards that modal sound. Once I figured it out, I got bitten by the bug so hard. In time that merged into honky-tonk."

Songwriting began only about 2007. Sarah Jane's biggest inspirations in the craft are Willie P. Bennett, Hank Williams, and Stan Rogers, with Lucinda Williams and Irish DeMent close behind.

For a while, she ran Blackstrap Sadie's Old-Time Jamboree in Vancouver, a closed-mic series where she and guests—sometimes family members—performed.

It took grief and emotional trauma to fully release Sarah Jane's abilities as a writer.

"To access deep pain and write about it, I needed to be in it myself. That happened five years ago when my parents split up in a rather catastrophic way. When my record *The Cape* [2014] came out, I felt I had to be very veiled talking about it.

"I discovered the therapeutic qualities of songwriting. You feel you've really earned a song by hurting for it so bad, and I carried

that experience through to the next record that is happier. I was able to figure out how to access what I was feeling and put it down on paper and through music—to accurately reflect myself at that point.”

Heartache brought inspiration, like *Bloom*’s uptempo folk-pop title track, with Sarah Jane’s warning: “*When the bloom falls from the rose / you’ll be sleeping in a bed of thorns*”, adding with black irony, “*And you oughta know I love to wreck my health*”.

The much slower, reverb-rich *Poland* is a lament—essentially a Canadian fado—for a relationship that’s gone, yet continues to yield songs.

“I have a muse whose name is Lucas. We got together, and drove across the country in this vintage two-seater sports car. We got to Toronto and he stayed with me a couple of months, then went to Mexico. I wrote songs about him on both *The Cape* and *Bloom*. When he was going away, I wrote that. He’s the son of Polish political refugees who came to Canada, which accounts for the lines, “*If you were the king*

of Poland I’d be the consort of the damned / It’s these hard-luck truths and petty lies that make me what I am”.

The mood of yearning is much enhanced by the production of Andre Wahl. “He’s a wizard. It’s incredible what he accomplished in eight long days. He was going for like a wall-of-sound thing, as epitomized by Daniel Lanois. I had all these songs and I wasn’t sure how to make them relate to one another. But he did it.”

Sarah Jane likes to keep things varied and contrasting—in subject, atmosphere, and tempo. The slower and more reflective songs are balanced by the sassy, Memphis Minnie-inspired *Bang Bang*, and the retro country-pop of *Coupe De Ville Rag*.

Folk is never far away. On *Bloom*, there are two “new traditional” songs—the cowboy waltz *Where The Ghost River Flows* by Jasper Adams and *Britannia Mine*, with words by Vancouver’s late Paddy Graber protesting a B.C. mine closure, which is set to the air of Irish lament and call-to-arms *Skibbereen*.

“I love traditional American music—for

me that spans everything from sea shanties to Cajun and zydeco. I still think there’s traditional music being created.”

And when was the last time you heard ‘scurvy’ in a song? Here it is in the title and opening line of the darkly poetic waltz *Rosehips For Scurvy*, which touches on herbal medicine, depression, and the cycle of life in a wholly unpretentious way.

As *Bloom* eloquently attests, Sarah Jane has developed into one of the most versatile, and sometimes quirkiest, songwriters on the Canadian roots scene—abroad, too. From mid-September to early November, she’s back in Europe for the fourth time; in Germany, Belgium, Holland, and with two dozen shows in the U.K.

After that, she’ll take a breather, and think about the next release. There’s no lack of inspiration.

“I’ve been talking of a record with my sister, and I also want to do an album of all-traditional Western Canadian material—cowboy and mining songs that would have to be heavily arranged. Actually, there are five ideas for albums in my head.”



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The Young 'Uns

Largely a cappella, this trio merit a growing reputation for writing some of folk's finest new songs.

By Colin Irwin

An audience with the Young 'Uns is an encounter with an extreme—and extremely entertaining—force of nature. Well, three forces of nature, to be precise. Sean Cooney, Michael Hughes, and David Eagle sit on bales of hay in a teepee (don't ask!) at Folk East Festival in deepest Suffolk on the east coast of England, delivering breakneck bon mots, homespun philosophy, razor wit, frequent bursts of laughter, and heartfelt pronouncements about the state of the world and all who sail on her.

Much, as it happens, like they do onstage, where they've firmly established themselves as one of Britain's biggest folk attractions, with their irresistible mixture of quick-fire banter, potent social commentaries, and harmonies to die for. Having already won best group at the BBC Folk Awards two years on the trot (2015 and 2016), their brilliant new album, *Strangers*, is poised to accelerate their already impressive progress at an even faster rate.

Not just in the U.K., either—they've already appeared plenty of times in Canada and are looking forward to doing more.

"I think we've done more festivals in Canada than we have in the U.K.," says king of comedy, deejay, and podcaster-in-chief Dave Eagle. "We've done Vancouver, Mariposa, Canmore, Calgary...we love those workshops they have. The unpredictability of singing with someone you've never met before. We did one with Ramy Essam. We didn't know who he was but we looked him up and

he turned out to be the voice of the Egyptian revolution...he was pulled out and beaten up but still turned up the next day with a bandage on his head."

Michael Hughes also throws the name of Black Umfolosi into their list of random Canadian collaborations, making train noises and all.

"We ended up singing with them, dancing with them and everything...you haven't seen anything until you've seen Dave Eagle dancing with Black Umfolosi." Eagle has been blind from infancy.

With the exception of a cover of Maggie Holland's *A Place Called England*, which serves as a sort of opening symphony, introducing the topics of inequality, wealth divide, injustice, and immigration that populate it, *Strangers*—their fourth album—is written entirely by Sean Cooney, cementing his growing reputation as one of the finest folk songwriters in the business.

Above all, they are storytellers, dealing in real tales of real people. Some of them emanate from their Teesside home in the northeast of England, like the singalong *Ghafoor's Bus*, which commemorates the humanitarian efforts of local man Ghafoor Hussain, who invested his own money converting a bus into a travelling kitchen to feed refugees and migrants all over Europe.

The Hartlepool Pedlar is the tale of Michael Marks, an Eastern European Jewish refugee who arrived in the northeast of England and went on to set up the Marks & Spencer store.

Cable Street tells of another local man, Johnny Longstaff from Stockton-on-Tees, who at 16 marched to London in search of work and defied the police to stand in solidarity with the Jewish community blocking a fascist march in the East End. So taken are they by Longstaff's story (he later fought fascists in the Spanish Civil War),

they are now writing a full show based on his life to be narrated by Longstaff's son.

Two original Cooney songs, however, tower above them all, both inspired by modern-day heroes. With a particularly epic chorus, *Be The Man* celebrates Matthew Ogston, who walked 130 miles from London to Birmingham in his fight against religious and cultural homophobia; and *Dark Water* portrays Hesham Modamani, a Syrian refugee who swam five miles across the Aegean Sea in search of freedom.

"Both songs were very difficult to write," says Cooney. "I heard their stories and thought, 'Wow, that's amazing', but the stories were so big it seemed disrespectful to suddenly pick up a pen and start writing. They are very much real people desperate to tell the stories themselves so I had to really think about what I wanted to say. Matt Ogston has set up a foundation to tell his story so it was with great trepidation that I came in as an outsider to create a piece of art about him.

"And *Dark Water* was Hesham Modamani's own words, essentially. The first interview I heard from him was in broken English and I was very taken by that phrase 'dark water, deep water' and the refrain came from that. I wanted to find out everything I could about him to make it accurate. That sounds very journalistic and I suppose a lot of my writing is. I did history at university and I always want to be precise about facts."

Serious stuff, indeed, but that's soon deflected by their irrepressible exuberance and humour. You wonder at times if there's a dichotomy between singing songs of such gravity one minute and cracking up audiences with hilarious banter the next...

"It's reflective of the ups and downs of life, really," says Eagle. "The humour makes the emotion of the songs more potent. If you're laughing at something and then you are suddenly thinking about someone swimming across the Aegean Sea it makes you realize how lucky you are and contextualizes the situation. If there's no light and shade and you immerse people in harrowing tales for 90 minutes then it can become the norm and you might easily switch off. It's like bleak story after bleak story on the news, you just switch off.

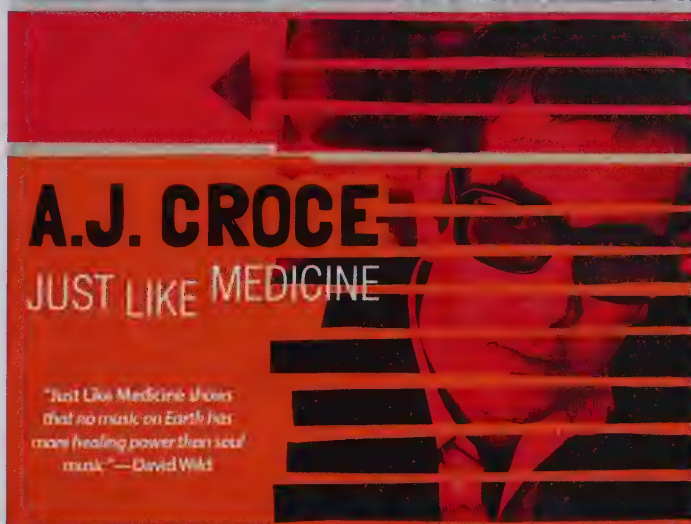
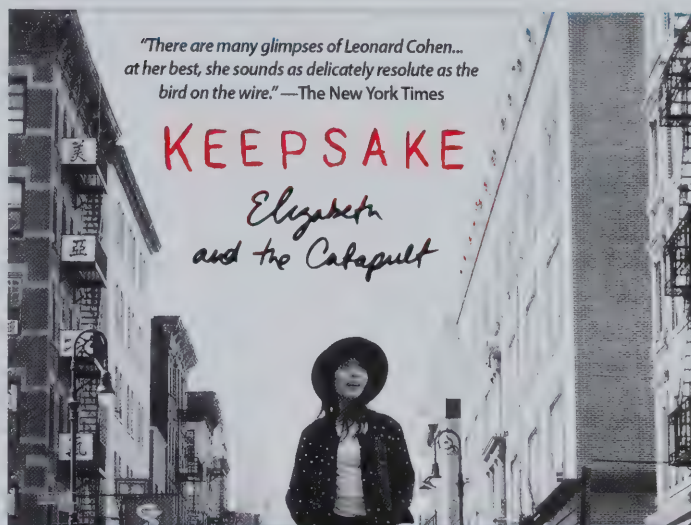
"But there's a strange paradox when if you're laughing at something and then see something else that suddenly jars, it creates an interesting disconnect. We were brought up in a folk world where the late Vin Garbutt would be saying hilarious things one minute and then be breaking your heart the next so it feels natural to do that."

Their singing is resolutely unaccompanied most of the time—and they intend to keep it that way—though Eagle's accordion and piano does come into play on occasion and, in fact, the big songs *Be The Man* and *Dark Water* do feature keyboards and strings.

Sean: "I tend to write songs on a guitar and sing them to Mike and Dave, and we might add piano and accordion and think about adding fiddle and start doing it like that, and then we realize we are losing the focus of the song, the story. It's always about the story for me, and any music must always complement the story. There's something about the three of us just singing together that seems to work really well."

You can say that again.

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In The Name Of The King



The Decemberists and Olivia Chaney, as Offa Rex, draw from the visionary legacy of Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention and The Albion Band to reinvent trad' folk-rock.
Words: By Roddy Campbell

at the thought. Beside him, Olivia Chaney—one of the truly considerable and fiercely distinctive voices in current English folk culture—shakes her head, eyes dancing with devilment.

“It was going to be Milk The Death Adder. I still love it as a band name but we went with Offa Rex,” says Meloy.

We’re sitting backstage at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival discussing Offa Rex—the meticulous collaboration between The Decemberists and Chaney that produced the remarkably compelling, largely traditional album *The Queen of Hearts*.

At its core lies Meloy’s historic infatuation with British folk-rock records made by bands fronted by iconic female singers. The evidence m’lord: Fairport Convention and Sandy Denny, Steeleye Span and Maddy Prior, and The Albion Band and Shirley Collins. And when Meloy read a glowing profile of Chaney in *The New Yorker* magazine in 2015, he immediately sought her lauded debut album, *The Longest River*, started a correspondence, and invited her to tour opening for The Decemberists.

Colin: “I was imagining the perfect pairings of contemporary folk musicians doing old songs. I think I even tweeted The Unthanks about doing *The Grey Funnel Line*, which they should totally do. But I was,

A

n outlandishly odd name for a band, Offa Rex. But then again, consider the only serious alternative: Milk The Death Adder.

Colin Meloy, lead hand with the customarily exceptional yet unpredictable, chart-topping Portland, OR, indie outfit, The Decemberists, sits and chuckles

like, if Olivia would ever do *Willie O' Winsbury*, I would totally lose my mind.

"I was totally a fan of her record. She came out on the road with us and I kept trying to egg her on to do at least a back-stage version of *Willie O' Winsbury* with Chris [Funk] and I on bouzoukis. We never quite got there. So it wasn't until later, until I had the revelation to try and put together a kind of Albion Band, where there's a sort of backing band and the focal point of a singer doing all the trad' songs."

His pitch to Chaney?

"We'll be your Albion Band to your Shirley Collins!"

The silver-tongued devil.

Olivia: "I just laughed. I had just come off stage and was feeling a bit wobbly after a particular show where my guitar fell off in the middle of a song in front of 3,000 Decemberists fans. We were just hanging out before they went onstage. And Colin was saying, 'You know, you should work with [producer] Tucker Martine. You should come out to Portland.' I found it really fun but you know how it is—then you go back home, miles away across the Atlantic Ocean...but then he's, 'No, actually we should do this.' And then I took it more seriously."

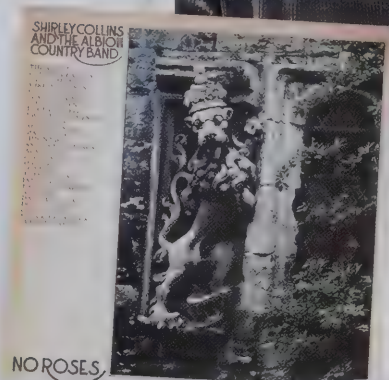
Offa Rex now had legs. For the record, King Offa or Offa Rex, to give him his Latin title, ruled England's Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia from 757 until 796. Somewhat of a Christian despot, apparently, Offa came to the attention of Meloy through the poems of Geoffrey Hill. Meloy studied Hill's *Mercian Hymns* at the University of Montana. That series of 30 poems juxtapose the history of Offa with Hill's upbringing in modern Mercia—the West Midlands.

For *The Queen of Hearts*, Meloy and Chaney each compiled a wish list of songs—Colin's short and concise, Olivia's 'like a *Child Ballad*'—with the aforementioned *Willie O' Winsbury* a mutual choice. Both cherished the version from the singing of the enigmatic Anne Briggs on her self-titled debut album.

Colin: "That's just one of my favourite songs. I feel it was one of the songs that really grabbed me as I was delving into the British folk revival. That first Anne Briggs record, you know, I played it endlessly. *Willie O' Winsbury* was a standout, a gorgeous song. And her arrangements and her performance on that are so incredible. So that's really where I came from. I thought we could do it really nice."

A master of the understatement, that man Meloy. While Willie's had an airing or two in recent years, most memorably on Anäis Mitchell and Jefferson Hamer's *Child Ballads* album, the gorgeous Offa Rex version stands out on its own, right through Chaney's glorious phrasing and the fine, simple acoustic strings that tie it so splendidly together.

The Decemberists, of course, had previously collaborated briefly



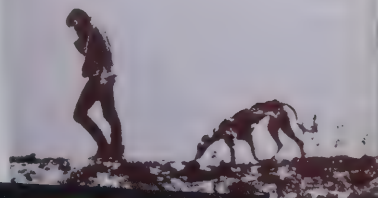
with T Bone Burnett and The Chieftains, covering Bob Dylan's *When The Ship Comes In* for their 50th anniversary album, *Voice of Ages*. Chaney, also, put a shift or two in with both Alasdair Roberts and Concerto Caledonia, and Kronos Quartet. Offa Rex, though, was a whole different kettle of cod.

Olivia: "This one was making a record in a way two lead singers really had to meet in the middle. I think I can speak for both of us, that was quite a fresh challenge for Colin. He's used to calling the shots with his band and writing songs and bringing it to every one. But I'd written a lot of the arrangements. Working with Colin and Tucker, I learned to let go. It was wonderful."

They spent three weeks on the arrangements prior to recording at Martine's Flora

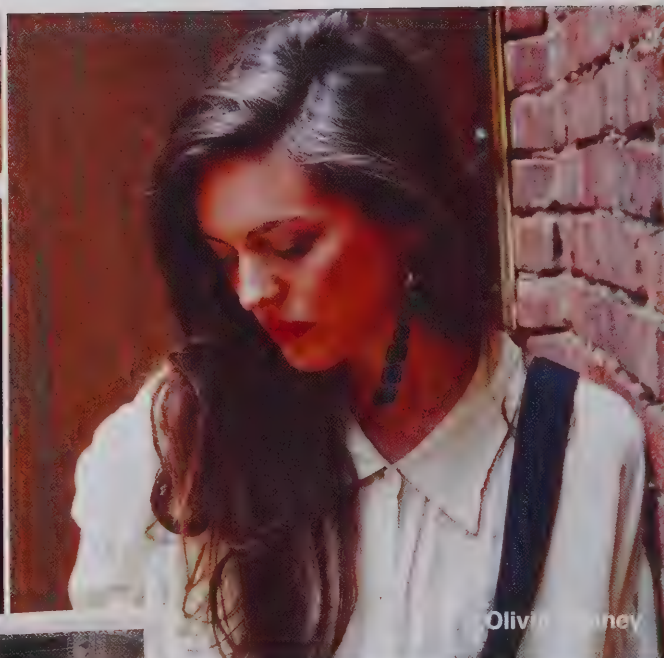
Anne Briggs

TOPIC





Colin Meloy



Olivia Chaney

studio in Portland, OR, in early September 2016. Martine's long litany of credits includes R.E.M., Beth Orton, Death Cab For Cutie, and, of course, The Decemberists.

Gradually they found their feet after spending the first three days working on the old Steel-eye Span warhorse *Dark Eyed Sailor*. Ironically, it failed to make the final cut. Lal Waterson's *Fine Horseman* received an honourable mention, too, but was also passed over. Instead they used her *To Make You Stay*. That, and Meloy's 'hill to die on'—Ewan McColl's *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*—are the only two contemporary songs on *Queen of Hearts*. On the latter, though, he insisted on drawing from Peggy Seeger's version in an attempt to distance it from the ubiquitous Roberta Flack cover.

Colin: "Peggy's version has this really weird little askew—a freak-folkish feel to it. It's angular in a way that only Peggy can do. And I say that as a Peggy Seeger fan. I thought it would be interesting as an experiment to pull it back a little bit, back from the Roberta Flack version and use Peggy's more as a touchstone."

The remaining nine tracks all come from the British tradition. And Chaney and Meloy did their homework, seeking out less-obvious sources for such infallible songs as *Flash Company* taken from the Romany singer Phoebe Smith. The title track and its brilliant opening line, "*To the Queen of Hearts he's the ace of sorrow / He's here today but gone tomorrow*," comes from Martin



Olivia Chaney The Longest River



Carthy's self-titled debut album released in 1965. It's flamboyantly reinvented by Offa Rex with a ghostly harpsichord, tasteful electric guitar licks, and Chaney's wall-to-wall, soaring vocals.

Olivia: "What was really nice about doing this project with Colin was reminding myself of old things that I haven't listened to for a long time. That Martin [Carthy] record, I found myself being completely blown away by it again. And just being reminded how influential and how iconic his style is and the blend of his singing and amazing guitar playing with the vocal inflections and the way he spits out a story. I sat and watched him play where he was literally spitting on people in the front row [she laughs]. I just love that about him."

"I was trying to come up with my own harmonization, and playing with the band in mind, trying to put it into a frame where we could have our own personalities come out in the arrangements. And I think that worked. I asked Martin if he minded. He said, 'Do what you want with it; it's folk music'."

Martin Carthy, of course, is married to Norma Waterson—the sister of Mike and Lal Waterson, who recorded *Bright Phoebus* on which *To Make You Stay* first appeared. While largely ignored on its release in 1971, *Bright Phoebus* is now considered a masterpiece: wait for it, 'the Sergeant Pepper of folk-rock'. Right, well.

Scrounge around the initial watershed folk-rock recordings made in the late '60s and early '70s and you'll find a distinct road less

travelled that inevitably leads to Offa Rex.

Olivia: “We certainly didn’t go into the studio and go, ‘Right these are going to be our influences’. But it kind of filtered down from some of these iconic musicians, many of whom are still going strong and playing now and I sing alongside sometimes if I’m lucky enough. But I think there was a time towards the end of the recording that we did get cramped and we were like, ‘Oh God, is it all Steeleye Span covers?’ and we wanted to re-jig. But speaking for myself, I’m not ashamed to be playing some kind of homage to these people.”

All the same, the folk purists will undoubtedly nail wreaths of garlic above their doors on hearing the wonderfully titled *Sheepcrock and Black Dog*, with its bold but startling guitar shredding. If it sounds like Black Sabbath, then blame the ‘school outing’ Offa Rex took to hear the metal messiahs while recording *The Queen of Hearts*.

Colin: “I always thought there was an intersection between the folk music that was happening at the time and metal as it was beginning. It was interesting as both things were happening alongside each other and shared the same motives. Jimmy Page was a fan of Bert Jansch and Sandy [Denny] sang on [Led Zeppelin’s] *The Battle of Evermore*. That song, and Steeleye’s version of *Sheepcrock and Black Dog* [from *Below The Salt*] always struck me as having a metal overtone to it, so we gave it a shot.”

And for any of you trainspotters out there, here’s a piece of minutiae that highlights the harum-scarum evolution of traditional folk songs. The initial love interest in *Sheepcrock and Black Dog* is called Dinah. Not on the Offa Rex rendition.

Mr. Meloy, explain: “We were doing a riff on the Steeleye Span version. We thought it would be interesting to inject Flora into there because it was also the name of the studio—so it was a bit of a name check for the studio.”

Olivia: “That’s an example of why Andy Irvine encourages you as a folksinger, taking on the mantle of a song, to interpret it your own way and make it feel like your own. If you want to tweak a lyric, that’s OK.”

Colin Patrick Henry Meloy was born Oct. 5, 1974, in Helena, MT, and would graduate from the University of Montana in Missoula with a BA in creative writing in 1998. Writing runs in the family. Both his sister, Ellen Meloy, and late aunt, Maile Meloy, published critically acclaimed books. And Colin and his artist wife, Carson Ellis, have also written and illustrated a successful series of books for children.

Colin and Carson met in Portland, OR, before he put together The Decemberists—a name he adopted from an 1825 uprising in imperial Russia—in 2000. While the biographical details of the band are well documented in *Penguin Eggs* No. 50, Colin would occasionally tour solo and record, now out of print, limited batches of EPs such as *Colin Meloy Sings Shirley Collins* (2006). Collins he had arrived at after a bewildering introduction to rogue folk’s once-bright young upstarts.

Colin: “I got into The Pogues because I read they were the best punk band since the Sex Pistols. I was in the eighth grade and it was like, ‘Yay, punk music’,

you know. It was a crazy moment putting on that record, *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*. That was a shock. So there was that connection. It wasn’t until I was in my late 20s, early 30s that I started digging into Fairport Convention. I knew these bands from reading about them but they always felt dusty. Finding Shirley Collins, whom I’d never known about, was exciting because it reminded me of being a kid and discovering punk or new wave.

“People like Lal [Waterson] and Dick [Gaughan], the way they sing is so much their own. To my mind it is what folk music is, it is coming from the folk, the people. It’s very unadorned through warts and all. I think Anne Briggs fits into that even though she has a gorgeous voice. My favourite parts of the Anne Briggs records are the little mistakes. It feels very human and in that sense it’s the sort of stuff that drew me to punk and some new wave where virtuosity isn’t king. It’s really about soul.”

Olivia Chaney had her dad’s record collection to browse as a child. He was a big Anne Briggs and Sandy Denny fan. There was also Bert Jansch, Joni Mitchell, Martin Carthy, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan discs. While born in Florence, Italy, in 1982, Olivia grew up in Oxford, England. A somewhat precocious child, she played piano and cello and won a scholarship to the exclusive Chetham’s School of Music in Manchester. From there, she went on to study jazz at the Royal Academy of Music in London and developed a deep love for Keith Jarrett, Stravinsky, and, in particular, the English composer Henry Purcell.

“So much of his ditties sound like folk music to me,” she told *fRoots* magazine. Indeed, she recorded Purcell’s *There’s Not a Swain on The Longest River*. For a time, she dabbled in performance art where the participants ran around bare-arsed making guttural sounds. But that’s a conversation for another day.

Olivia: “I studied classical music most of my life and did a lot of weird experimental stuff and collaborated with performance artists. It was when I was trying to write that’s when I thought, ‘I’m going to get more deeply into [folk] music and the origins of what inspired a lot of ’60s songwriters like Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen.’ When I started analyzing their songs or reading what they had said about the writing process, I realized that there was that gem in folk music as well. That’s what made me dig deeper into it.

“For me, it’s the songs themselves, which I think Colin would say influenced his own writing, and mine, very much, and the telling of stories which, at first, to some people’s ears, might sound archaic where there’s damsels in distress, and strange murders and things. But actually, I think it’s because humans recognize that these themes are ever recurring. Even if you take out the anachronisms, the meanings still carry on extraordinarily now.”

So what now for the mighty Offa Rex?

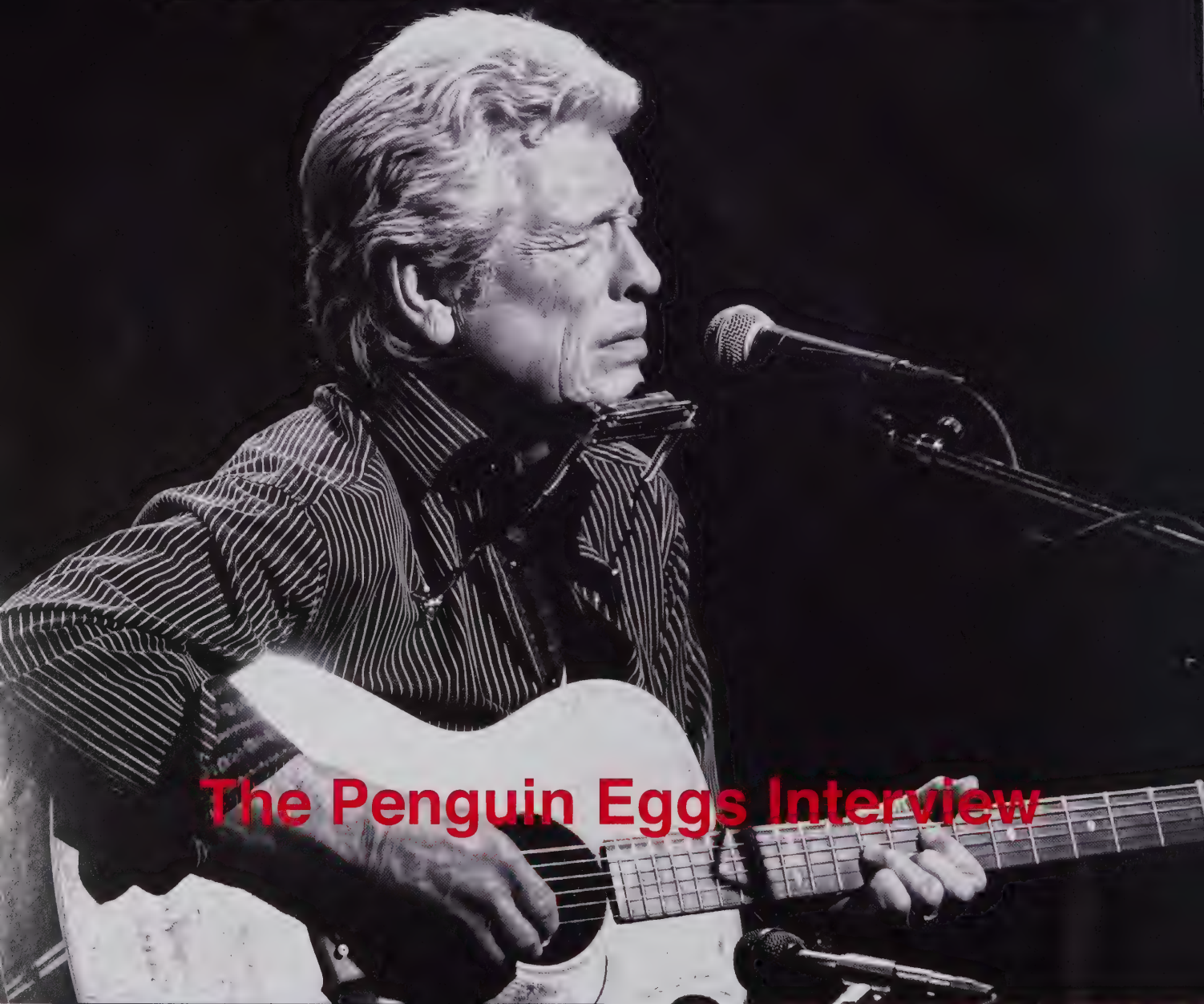
Colin: “By the end of this tour in late August, Offa Rex will go into hiding, go into hibernation, go back into its crypt. We’ll see.”

Post Script: Sadly, as The Decemberists/Offa Rex prepared to perform in Edmonton, 80 m.p.h. winds ripped through the festival and the site was evacuated. The show did not go on.



“It was a crazy moment putting on that record, *If I Should Fall From Grace With God*. That was a shock.”

John Hammond



The Penguin Eggs Interview

Steve Dawson – the multi-talented, award-winning musician and producer – needs little introduction in these pages. But what you might not know about Steve is he hosts a podcast—**Music Makers and Soul Shakers**—which features in-depth conversations with numerous fabled musicians. The following transcribed interview with **John Hammond**, and numerous others, can be found at www.stevedawson.ca.

In Episode four of the podcast, I speak with the legendary blues artist John Hammond. John has had an incredible career that spans more than five decades. Since his debut in 1965, he has recorded more than 40 albums, and has worked with luminaries such as Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, The Band, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, and many others. During the '70s and '80s, John stayed true to his roots and almost singlehandedly kept the solo country and delta blues styles alive. John and I had a great conversation that touched on his guitar playing, his recording history, a memorable night in New York that had him playing with BOTH Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton in his band, signing numerous record deals that never seemed to quite work out, how the Wicked Grin record with Tom Waits almost never

happened, and lots more! – Steve Dawson

You're still out there a lot. What's your tour schedule like these days? How many gigs a year would you still be doing?

Ooh, I don't count 'em. As they come in, I take them or don't take them. But it's a lot less than I used to do. I'm trying to cherry pick the best shows.

I thought maybe I could start by asking you about your guitar playing because that is originally what I was drawn to...but the thing that really stuck out for me is your electric playing, which is a whole different thing we could talk about, and on the acoustic, particularly on the National your right hand is unlike anything I've ever seen, it's like a freight train. I wonder if you could maybe talk a bit about how your particular style developed on the guitar. There's something totally unique about the way you play.

OK. I was a big fan of blues and early rock'n'roll. As a kid, I never played an instrument so it was just in my head. Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley were a couple of my favourite rock'n'rollers that basically came from blues.

And as a blues fan, I listened to everything from Blind Boy Fuller to Robert Johnson to Willy McTell, Big Bill Broonzy. And all of these guys, they finger-style played. I knew very little about guitar techniques and stuff, so I got a guitar when I was 18. There were guys where I was going to school who played and I used to watch them. There was a guy named Ian Buchanan, Jorma Kaukonen (who was known as Jerry Kaukonen then)...

You went to school with him?

Ya, I did. I had a roommate named Russell Avery, who had a Martin 12-string guitar, and a friend named Bob Silverman, who played a Martin. I used to watch these guys play. I watched them very intently and figured out how to do some chords. I got a guitar that year and started to fool around on it a lot. I heard the music in my head but I didn't really have any technique that I knew, and I was a little embarrassed to ask anybody to show me stuff, so I just kind of worked it out myself.

And it got to a point where I could play at a party, and people would listen. I knew all the words to the songs. To me, the most important thing was the song, and if you could pull off the song by playing enough guitar to make it sound right, that was my initial technique.

I didn't play with a band so I was trying to get the rhythm of rock'n'roll things, the Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry kind of stuff. I developed as much rhythm/percussive stuff as I could with my right hand. I guess that's how my style developed.

So, you didn't start playing until you were 18?

Yes.

Wow! That's late.

Well, I started playing professionally when I was 19, so it didn't take very long.

What about the National? The National's a big part of your thing; did that come along right away?

No, not immediately. Probably 1962. I had been on the road for a year, and I was playing a lot of clubs and coffee house kind of gigs.

I was in New York and my father took me over to Eddy Bell's guitar headquarters. It was upstairs, I remember, and he had a whole bunch of acoustic and electric guitars. But he had a steel-body National there. I had seen photographs of Blind Boy Fuller playing one, and other artists, and I was fascinated by it.

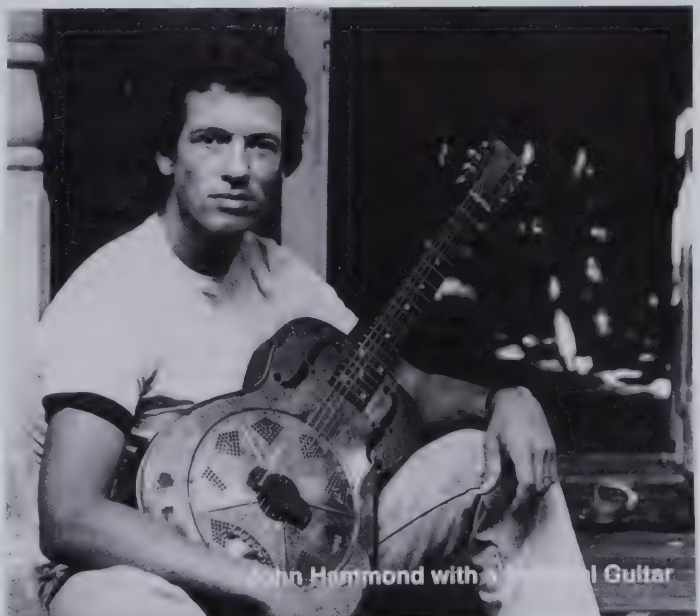
He had had it in the store for 30 years and couldn't sell it. So I got the whole thing with the case, \$65. That was my first National. It was so loud it was a little intimidating...

I figured out a way to put it in an open chord and do some slide stuff on it, and I thought that would add something to my show, another dimension kind of thing. It was a little intimidating at first but then I started to work at it and I got some things down.

Editor's note: Later on, they discuss how he hooked up with The Band.

I had been playing all these shows in Toronto. I had met this guy, well I met The Band, Levon and the Hawks. They had been the backup band for Ronnie Hawkins. They had left Ronnie and were out there on their own and did their own tours and stuff. ... They came to New York, and I had, like I say, met them in Toronto. I would hang out with them and sit in with them and they would come to my shows, you know. We were friends, and we hung out together....

They came to New York and they were trying to get a demo recording date and it wasn't going well. And I said, "Well, listen, I'm signed to Vanguard Records. Perhaps we could go in and make an album for Vanguard, you guys backing me up." And they said sure.



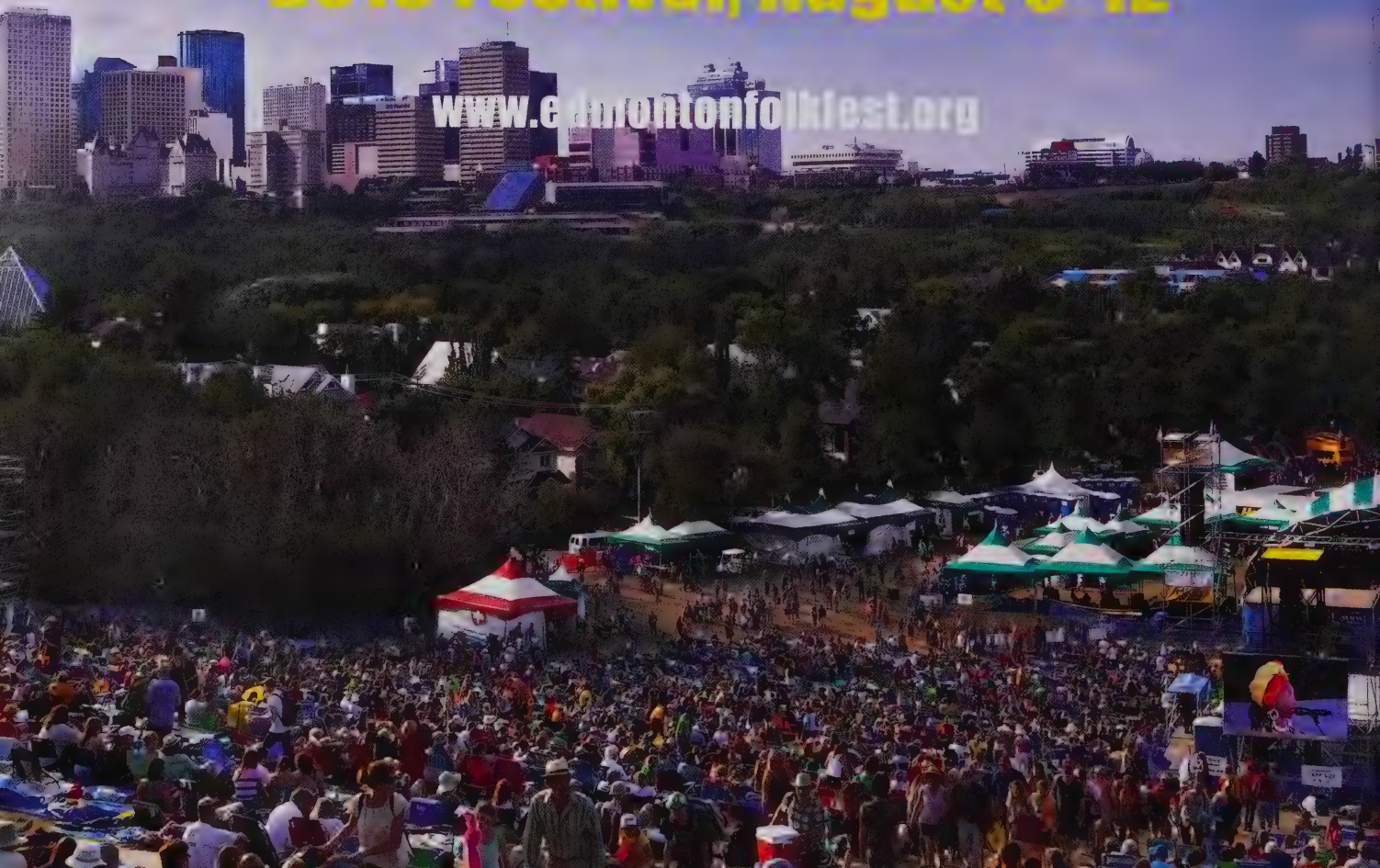
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Had you guys jammed together at this point?

Oh, ya, we'd jammed a lot of times together. So anyway, Vanguard was very reluctant. They gave us one session, three hours. And we cut about 20 songs or something. Dylan was there and my friend Mike Bloomfield was in town, Charlie Musselwhite was in town. ... We were all hanging out there and we made this record, and Vanguard didn't really know what to do with it but they released it anyway. So out came *So Many Roads*; that was '64 was the recording date and it was released in '65.

And so would that have been when Dylan hooked up with these guys?

Ya, that's when I introduced them. And the next thing I knew, they were his band (chuckles).

Now you hooked up with a little guitar player named Jimi James at some point, too, right?

Let's see, this was in '66. I had come back from the West Coast; I was playing at The Gaslight and across the street was a jam place called the Cafe Wha? and a friend of mine between sets came over and said to me, "This guy playing across the street is jamming with these guys and he's playing some stuff off your *So Many Roads* album. You gotta check him out." So I went over and there was Jimi James and he was the nicest guy. He knew who I was, I was introduced to him. I said, "Man, I can't believe how well you play."...

And he said, "I'm starving to death here in New York." He'd been fired from a band he'd been on tour with...and somebody stole his guitar, he was hanging out in the Village because he didn't know where else to be. And he was playing any gig he could get, and everybody that heard him would flip out.

So he says to me, "Can you get me a gig?" So I went over to the Cafe Au Go Go the next day and I asked the owner of the club, Howard Solomon, if he had any openings—if I put a band together, would he hire me.

He said, "God, we have an opening next week." So I put this little band together with Jimi Hendrix playing lead guitar, and everybody flipped out, it was packed out every night. He got offered a ticket and a recording deal to go to England with Chas Chandler...from that gig. And about a year later, he was the biggest thing in Europe.

...So that band was just put together for a week's show...did you ever see him again after that?

Oh, ya. He came back and I was playing at The Gaslight. I'd put my little trio together, this was in '67... And Jimi came back from Europe. He'd had a weird scene: the radio stations in the U.S. wouldn't play his hit song in Europe, *Hey, Joe*, so he got on a tour opening for The Monkees. He lasted about two dates and said forget about it and he came back to New York.

He came to check me out at The Gaslight. And also Eric Clapton...I did my first tour in England in '65 and I got on a whole bunch of shows with John Mayall and he had Eric Clapton playing guitar with him. He and I hit it off and, wow, what a great guitar

player. So anyway, he put Cream together. They'd come to New York and I knew Eric and he had my number.

So anyway, both Eric and Jimi came down to The Gaslight to hear me play on that same night and I got them both to sit in with me, and they came back every night for the week...

Now where are the recordings for that night?

There were no recordings, [but] it was fun. Then I watched both their careers just skyrocket.

Editor's note: Hammond and Dawson go on to discuss several of Hammond's milestone albums and the musicians he encountered and collaborated with, such as Duane Allman, Paul Butterfield, J.J. Cale, Eric Clapton, Delaney & Bonnie, John Lee Hooker, Phil Ochs, Robbie Robertson, Tom Waits, and others.

So, looking back on this huge discography and this amazing career with all these run-ins with crazy people, do you have a highlight record or two that for you really stick out as being "this was the moment for me when I was really firing on all cylinders and really getting across what I wanted to do"?

I think, for sure, the ones I did with J.J. Cale were dynamic. And then, of course, the one with Tom Waits. The one I did with Duane Allman back then was really dynamic also. And I really loved the one with Delaney & Bonnie. I'm satisfied.... I mean, every record that I do, I put everything into it. I mean, I really try to have it be the best I can do.

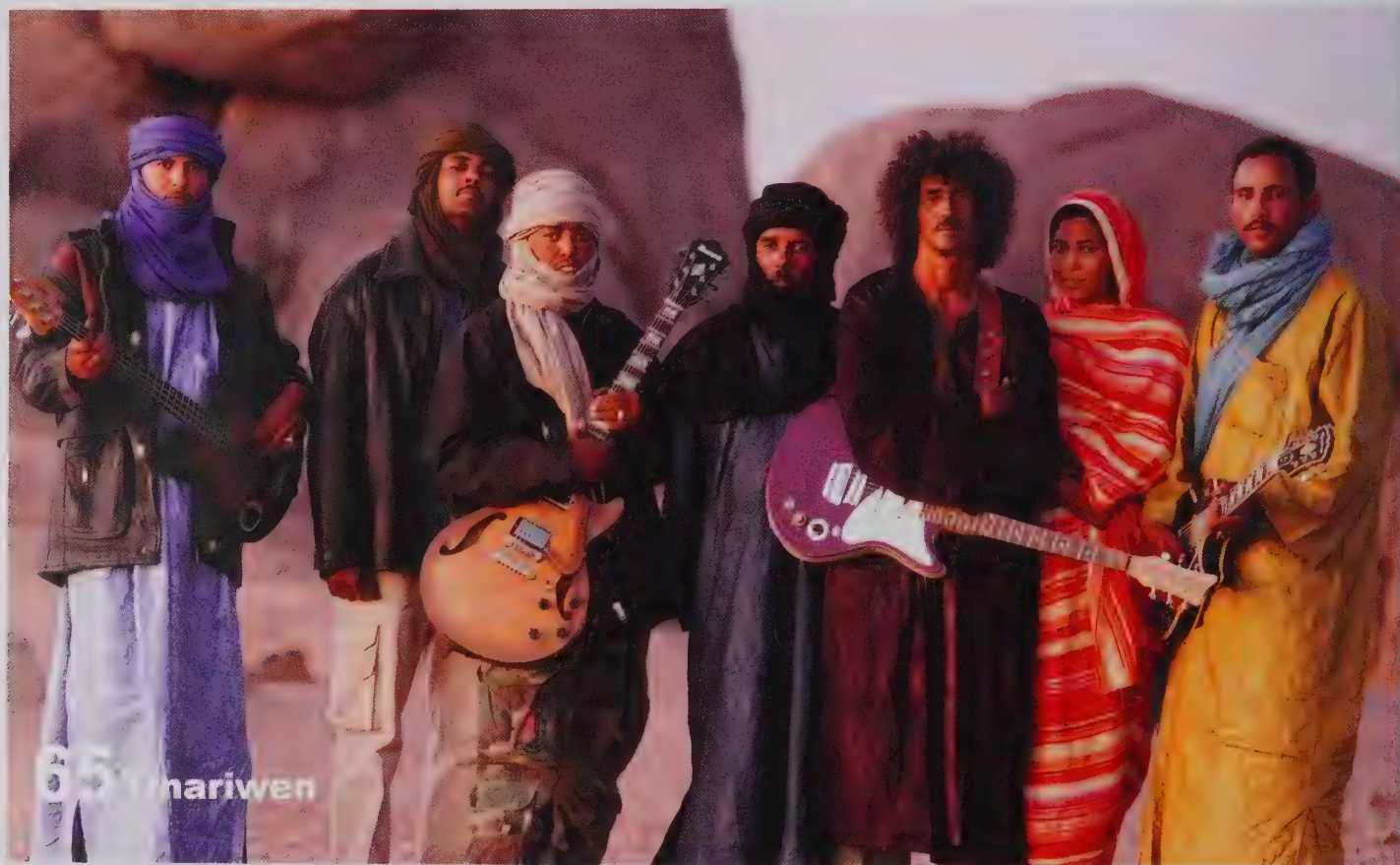
Is there anything, record wise, that you feel like you're needing to do still?

If the right thing comes up and there's the right money.... I just don't want to do it on a shoestring anymore. It's one of those things. I'm 73 years old and I'm trying to be selective on the gigs that I play, I mean much more selective than I have.

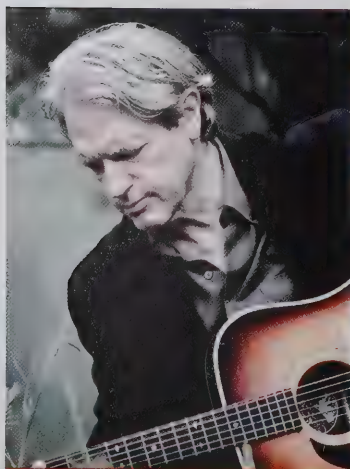


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Matthew Byrne

Matthew Byrne

Horizon Lines (Independent)



The dust has finally settled on Matthew Byrne's all-conquering

Hearts And Heroes. *Horizon Lines*, then, has a lot to live up to. And right from the start, it appears a bit busier than its predecessor with a variety of guests, including his dad Joe Byrne, adding delicate and inventive input on button accordion, dobro, upright bass and tenor banjo. While Byrne continues to develop as a talented, imaginative guitarist, his gracious, expansive singing is exquisitely highlighted on the unaccompanied *Woods of Truagh* and *Jim Harris*. For the most part, *Horizon Lines* largely features a selection of traditional-based songs collected or written around the Atlantic provinces. The notable exception, of course, is Byrne's own *Adelaide* – an exceptional, tender, family tale of undying love that spans decades. The sublime opening

track, *Long Years Ago*, and his beautiful instrumental, *Wedding Waltz*, also deserve ferocious applause. And yet, there's a creeping familiarity throughout that begs for a bolder Byrne to stretch beyond his comfort zone. Nonetheless, there's much on offer on *Horizon Lines* to cement his growing reputation as a treasured and impressive, young revivalist.

– By Roddy Campbell

Colleen Power

Raised On This (Baygirl Music)



On her latest album, Colleen Power has gone back to the songs she heard and sang growing up in Newfoundland's Freshwater, Placentia Bay. It's no surprise to find that it's full of the Newfoundland and Irish traditional favourites she heard coming up through the ceiling and into her room when her folks had people over.

It was very much with her family and friends in mind

that she tackled this labour of love. There are story songs and ballads of loss and longing. Among the more robust are *Cod Liver Oil* and *Molly Bawn*, both delivered with plenty of punch. *The Boston Burglar* and *Sam Hall* are ballads telling of the roughest of justice. *Raised On This* features a whole pack of Newfoundland traditional artists such as Fergus O'Byrne, Mark Hiscock, Jason Whelan, Dave Panting and Geoff Panting, and Sherry Ryan. Together, they nail this one right to the wall!

– By Tim Readman

Còig

Rove (Independent)



This is the second album from this Cape Breton super-group. They've lost one fiddler since their debut and haven't changed their name to reflect their diminished number. No matter, because there's nothing else that has diminished in any way. Quite the reverse, in fact—this is a walloping good set from these young lions of East Coast trad.

There are five songs and seven instrumental tunes on *Rove*, all wonderfully engineered and mixed by Dave Gunning. I'm really happy to hear them

increase the singing this time around. Rachel Davis and Darren McMullen both have fine voices, and McMullen's take on Peter Gabriel's *Solsbury Hill* was a very pleasant surprise. The purity of Davis's vocals shines on *Down the Road*.

Instrumentally, few can match these folks. Jason Roach, who is at his thunderous best on the fast and furious numbers, gives fine accompaniment to the superb fiddling of Davis and Chrissie Crowley. McMullen plays guitar, cello, bouzouki, mandolin, mandola, banjo, whistle, and flute—his choices of instrument perfectly complementing the rest of the band on every track.

There are plenty of reels, jigs, and strathspeys as you'd expect, as well as a surprise addition of a Dave Brubeck tune. That's *Three To Get Ready* played by four, in a band called five in Gaelic. What's not to like? Get it while it's hot!

– By Tim Readman

Martin Goyette

Big Beets (Independent)



Every once in awhile, you stumble into someone entirely unknown to you, providing an



opportunity to listen, devoid of any preconceived notions. Welcome, Montreal's Martin Goyette—with a voice that stops you in your tracks. Tom Waits's dad couldn't roar like this and there's enough of a blend of Dr. John, Roger Chapman (Family), and Captain Beefheart to demand your attention. His band—guitarist Jim Bland, bassist Jarrod Atkinson, keyboardist Chris Tauchner, drummer Louis-Etienne Drouin, and backup vocalist Mary-Pier Guilbeault—provide admirable support, sitting back a bit as this raw-throated presence takes over completely.

How he can sing like this without soaking his vocal cords in WD-30 between songs is beyond me. His is a rare weapon and his up-front harp playing is doubly welcome—as you know it has to be buying his voice

some downtime.

Ten original songs in both languages, Goyette and his band conjure an enticing collection of blues—all revolving around Goyette's distinctive vocal brand. From the hearty opener, *St. John Morning Blues*, where-in Bland's gentle guitar intro does nothing to prepare you for the band's beefy boogie that follows, to the more spectacular *Night Out*, which pushes Goyette into the foreground (as if he needs it).

Cue up *Rolling*, which slowly builds into a vocal explosion, words tumbling out of Goyette as if they can't be controlled, all the more direct, given the light accompaniment of electric keys and gentle guitar. A funky approach to *As Long As We're In Town* unearths a different groove, rolling off Goyette and Guilbeault as if second nature.

The highly peculiar *Bottle of Champagne* unleashes Atkinson's bass as Goyette spins an obscure lyric into a rich chorus that quickly takes hold. *That's The Way She Does It* is more traditional blues but reveals the band's limitations. With *No More Room*, the electric piano has run its course yet the track is salvaged by Goyette's growl of a gift and Bland's adventurous guitar, as the backup vocals add lustre.

Free Love is surprisingly hook-free while *Unwind* gets back to business as the pace slows down and Goyette and band construct a mysterious setting for this dark, Louisiana-spiced tale. This is a voice you won't forget—which runs the risk of overpowering the music around it. Yet, as the musicianship accepts this challenge, Martin Goyette and

his Big Beets are a band to look out for.

— By Eric Thom

Madison Violet

The Knight Sessions (Passenger Sounds, Inc.)



The eighth release by singer/songwriter duo Madison Violet

is a more back-to-basics sound for the pair. Consisting of five new tracks and five tracks from their 2016 album, *The Year Of The Horse*, which featured a more pop-oriented, drums, synthesizer, and electronic mix, this is a more stripped-down affair.

While still having a pop influence, to be sure, the focus is more on the duo's singing and acoustic instrument playing. There are still drums, bass, keyboards, and beats in places but more handclaps, finger snaps,



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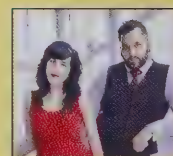
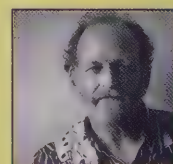
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and real drums and an overall simpler texture.

Brenley MacEachern and Lisa MacIsaac (sister of Ashley) are the names behind the duo and it's their singing that makes them special, their voices blending together in a tight mix like family. In fact, though they grew up 1,600 miles apart, their fathers sat next to each other in school in Cape Breton and their extended families overlapped in places. Those divine voices and their knack for putting together catchy words, melodies, and rhythms, which stay in the listener's mind, have been their ticket to the well-deserved big time of Canadian music and awards. This disc is another notch in the belts of this talented duo. *We Are Famous, Hush*, both mixes of *These Ships*, and *Ohio* are all completely infectious, and the other tracks are nothing short of pop/folk gems.

— By Barry Hammond

The Cash Box Kings

Royal Mint Alligator Records)



Dedicated to keeping the Chicago blues of the '40s, '50s

and '60s alive, the Cash Box Kings blend classic Chess and Sun sounds with deftly crafted originals, often with seamless

results. Vocalists Oscar Wilson and Joe Nosek spar across a fat 13 tracks while their blues collective borrows the talents of Billy Flynn and Joel Paterson on guitar, Brad Ber on bass, and Kenny Smith and Mark Haines on drums, interspersed with guest stars to fit the mould.

Nosek's skills on harmonica are standout while Wilson's authentic-sounding shout of a voice spurs his tracks forward with that extra dash of purity. Their relentless live touring has created a monster sound, evidenced in the opening salvo of Amos Milburn's *House Party*, complete with blasting harp and the highly appropriate C-Note Horns (Al Falashi, Darren Sterud, Jim Doherty).

One of the strongest tracks is a Nosek-Wilson co-write, *Blues For Chi-Raq*, despite its sad chronicling of Chicago's troubles. Against a slick wall of horns, Wilson slows things down as guitarists Flynn and Paterson stretch out between blasts of Nosek's strong harp-work.

Likewise, their cover of Robert Johnson's *Traveling Riverside Blues* makes the most of an overly familiar song to make it their own, as guitarist Joel Patterson showcases his skills on slide. With a sense of humour never far away, Wilson cuts a

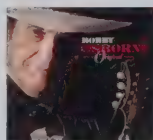


confident swagger through their inventive *If You Got A Jealous Woman Facebook Ain't Your Friend*, updating the genre with new reasons to have the blues. Likewise, the politically charged *Build That Wall* keeps their old content as current as can be, making their deeply rooted grasp of the genre future-friendly and twice as valid to today's blues audience.

— By Eric Thom

Bobby Osborne

Original (Compass)



Forget about Pavarotti. Bobby Osborne is the original tenor, and the epitome of that high lonesome sound of bluegrass.

Now 85 years old, Osborne still has the pipes that made The Osborne Brothers one of the greatest bands in bluegrass history. It's most fitting that banjoist and Compass Records CEO Alison Brown has gathered a huge roster of the top contemporary pickers to back him up. Bush, Hull, Ickes, Phillips, Duncan, and many more. The list of who's not here is shorter. And I'll eat my straw

hat if this disc doesn't rack up a bunch of IBMA awards.

Neither *Rocky Top* nor *Once More*, the signature tunes of The Osbornes, are included. But a swing version of *Don't Be Cruel* is, as well as The Bee Gees' *I've Got To Get A Message To You* and *Make The World Go Away* and a host of other fine bluegrass and country tunes.

With a different lineup on every song, including a couple with drums, an Osborne trademark in the '70s, every track is unique. Bobby still has his mandolin chops, too, especially on a twin mando excursion with Sierra Hull on Arthur Hancock's *Country Boy*.

Stellar picking and great songs all featuring one of the most talented singers in bluegrass history. It doesn't get much better than this for aficionados of the genre.

— By Mike Sadava

Basco

Interesting Times (Independent)



Danish quartet Basco, originally named for an uncle's dead dog, have been a popular group on the



The Cash Box Kings

European folk scene for several years, and members of the band have been presented awards at the Danish Music Awards—Artist of the Year (cittern player Ale Carr), and Vocalist of the Year (Hal Parfitt-Murray).

The band is Parfitt-Murray's brainchild and he is the composer of most of their works as well as lead singer, violinist, and mandolin player. The rest of the band includes Ale Carr (cittern), Andreas Tophøj (violin, viola), and Anders Ringgaard Anderson (accordion, trombone). Yes, trombone.

There are only two vocal tracks on the album, interpretations of two old English ballads—*Patrick Spens* and *The Three Mothers*. The rest are instrumentals that defy easy classification. They're not the typical jigs and reels you might expect, though there are

elements of that in the pieces. They have an experimental feel with unusual rhythms and melodies, and complex patterns that weave into a rich tapestry of instrumental sound, with names such as *The Friendly Neighbour*, *The Snitch*, *Roses in the Vase*, *It Ain't Stealing (If It's Really Yours)*, and *The Diplomat's Lament*. If you're looking for something off the beaten path, *Interesting Times* will provide you with just that.

— By Gene Wilburn

Catherine MacLellan

If It's Alright With You – The Songs of Gene MacLellan (True North Records)



That Catherine MacLellan should do an album of covers of her father's songs might seem a bit obvious—though, wait a



Catherine MacLellan

minute. She didn't do it as her first album, and has established her own voice with clarity and confidence. I expect that her audience isn't entirely aware of who her father was, too young to remember the radio ubiquity of *Put Your Hand in the Hand* and *Snowbird*.

Here she offers a fresh take on songs that are simply great, some of them, sadly, not as well known as they should be. Because she's done so much of her own work, she's also able to bring her own voice, her own persona, to the material. And it's gorgeous.

This isn't Anne Murray's *Snowbird* (or Elvis's, or Chet Atkins's) and it can leave you wishing that you could hear it for the first time. In a way, we do—the song seems sadder, more intimate, and rightly so. It's not a happy song, and the version here is an argument for why we shouldn't relegate it to the box of chestnuts. You can easily lose yourself within it.

MacLellan brings a lovely blues feel to *Put Your Hand in the Hand*, which thankfully takes it farther than the church picnic than it has typically liked

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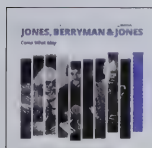
Some of the lesser-known songs, such as *Faces*, are so welcome, so fresh, that it doesn't really matter who wrote it or when. The musicianship and production are stunning, as are the harmonies with John Connolly on *The Call*. (Crikey that's a fantastic track.)

Don't listen to this because of Gene MacLellan, or out of any patriotic impulse. Listen to it because if you haven't yet heard it, you need to. It will be on a lot of 10-best lists at the end of the year, likely yours included. The album is a celebration of two great Canadians, father and daughter. The only thing that isn't great is the cover. But I guess who looks at covers these days anyway.

— By Glen Herbert

Wizz Jones, Pete Berryman, & Simeon Jones

Come What May (Riverboat)



In which British folk/blues/jazz legend Wizz Jones and his

old pal Pete Berryman do what they do so well on acoustic guitars while Jones junior, Simeon, comes along for the ride on flute, saxophone, and harmonica. Unsurprisingly, it is a musical journey over folk/blues/jazz territory, which is unfussy and unhurried.

All three share the vocal duties, Jones being particularly effective on Jez Lowe's *The New Moon's Arms* and the opener, *You're Blasé*. Berryman's delicate rendition of *A Red Paper Rose* takes a leaf from the lyric sheet of *St. James's Infirmary Blues*. There's also a subtle and effective cover of Peter Green's *Albatross*, re-imagined as an acoustic tour de force.

The Ballad Of The Sad



Young Men seems to have gone from Davy Graham and over to Rickie Lee Jones before heading back to this Mr. Jones for a lyrical treatment soaked in nostalgia and yearning. This is an effortless master class from real masters.

— By Tim Readman

The Dustbowl Revival

The Dustbowl Revival (Signature Sounds)



After a decade of evolution, including elements of Dixieland, jazz, folk, and even bluegrass, this eight-piece band has morphed into a full-scale R&B band. With a funky rhythm section and four horns, The Dustbowl Revival struts with a sound that would have been at home in the studio of Stax Records.

The seamless vocal duets of Liz Beebe and Zach Lupetin sometimes approach the modern-day equivalent of Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell: their voices are made for each other.

There's great interplay of horns, especially the growling

trombone of Ulf Bjorling, and some of their lyrics could have been written in the old rhythm and blues era. Take their single, *Busted*, so replete with double negatives: "*If you think you got somethin' but you don't got nothin' honey if you don't got me.*"

But the Revival maintain their unique combination of string-band instruments with a horn section, and it works. I've been trying for decades to convince people that the mandolin fits well with this type of music: a great rhythm instrument in the upper registers of the piano.



Rachel Baiman

My only criticism is that Beebe's vocal phrasing sometimes sounds influenced a little too much by Rachael Price of Lake Street Dive. Her own voice is fine.

— By Mike Sadava

Rachel Baiman

Shame (Free Dirt Records)



Listening to this disc is a bit frustrating. Rachel Baiman is a serious

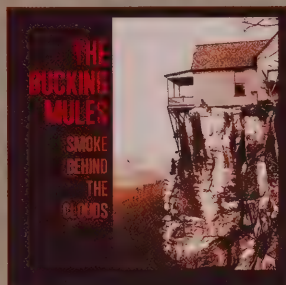
young songwriter from Nashville, tackling political issues with aplomb. The title track is about a woman's determination not to feel church-imposed shame about an abortion: "*Any man can walk away from the love he wants to leave, there I'll be left standing with a child and a dream*". *Take A Stand* is a chilling song about child abuse.

Baiman is also a fine instrumentalist on banjo and fiddle. And the production by Andrew Marlin of Mandolin Orange fame is crystal clear. This is a substantial, great-sounding disc.

That said, I wish she didn't sound so much like Gillian

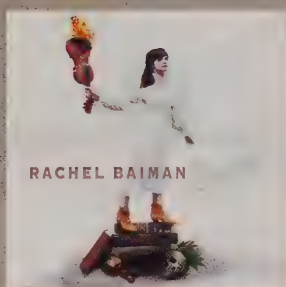
free dirt RECORDS

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RACHEL BAIMAN
SHAME



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Welch. Her attack, her phrasing is so much like Welch's that a friend thought it was a new album by the veteran songwriter. She breaks that mould on *Getting Ready To Start*, a rousing, high-register tune filled with three-part harmonies, and it's refreshing.

It's not that Welch is a bad influence for any songwriter, but if only Baiman had found her own voice for an otherwise great album.

— By Mike Sadava

Kim Doolittle

Into The Blue (Independent)



Without question, Kim Doolittle has a big voice. A real-

ly big voice. Like Kate Smith meets Tracy Nelson big. Self-schooled the hard way, hers is a blend of folk, blues, and country and because she simply enjoys singing, it's wise to have placed herself in the care of Ken Whiteley as producer.

Given his abilities to surround the Annapolis Valley native with simpatico players, Doolittle has her best foot forward across 11 songs—all originals but one. The title track is a busting-out song, encapsulated by the cover shot, yet there's no real hint of her true musical personality despite its positive outlook. A fitting cover track, it has

a feel-good, summer radio vibe and one can't help but feel a slight Gayle Garnett flashback.

However, it's a song such as her *Under the Memphis Moon* that begins to reveal her many colours, taking on a more sultry tone here (and some lush B3 from Whiteley). Likewise, *Let Love Be Your Goal* boasts a strong arrangement and a softer Doolittle brings on a hint of Rita Coolidge's Delta sound.

For a woman who won't sing "lawdy dawdys" on Kris Kristofferson's *Me and Bobby McGee*, it's surprising to hear the "oh my mys" on *Poor Boy*, yet the Cajun-flavoured track reveals yet another layer (and the humour behind *Snowballs Day In Hell* is not lost).

The best track on this record is *Let The River Run*, beautiful and overflowing with heart, given that it's written about the Annapolis River of her hometown of Bridgetown, NS. With the added help of John Snowden's violin, the song gets entirely under your skin and is also one of the best examples of Doolittle's ability to control those big pipes of hers (it was not really a surprise to learn that she once fronted a metal band back in the day, as she can clearly do it all).

The world was never in need of yet another cover of



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Kim Doolittle

Amazing Grace yet she does an admirable job, adding a tasty swing to it, with an able assist from Whiteley's piano and B3 embellishment. The siren in her range emerges in the sassy *It Just Don't Work Like That* while *Long, Long Way From Here* provides another highlight with its strong, Bonnie Raitt-like lilt and the bold mandolin presence of Ken Whiteley and Radim Zenki.

The perky *Some Lovers Never Leave* is old-school folk with a slight Acadian country feel that, although a somewhat dated approach, suits this singer to a T—as her comfort level gushes over into a very good place.

A strong release from this nine-record vet, nicely packaged up with the Whiteley touch.

— By Eric Thom

Bruce Cockburn

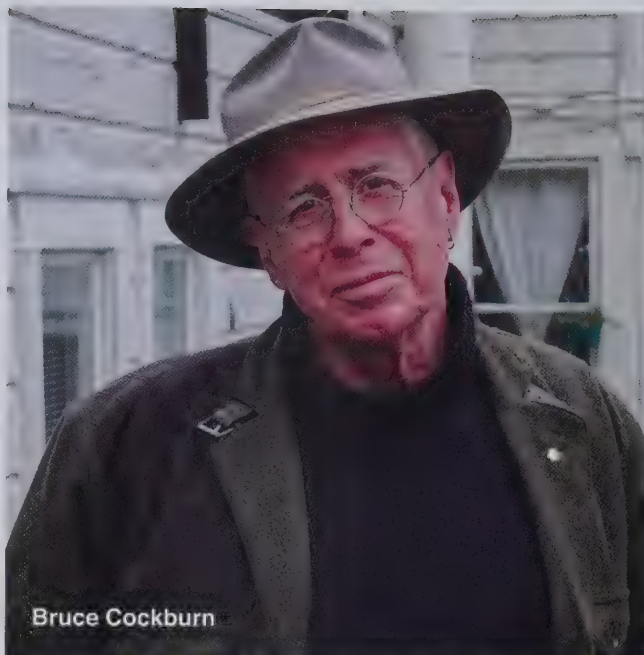
Bone On Bone (True North Records)



It's been too long. Bruce Cockburn's last collection of new music,

Small Source of Comfort, was six years ago, after which he poured his creative juices into his 2014 memoir *Rumours of Glory*. Now he's back, and it was worth the wait.

Bone On Bone is a vigorous, diverse, and satisfyingly outspoken (you expected anything less from this fellow?) collection of instrumental and vocal tracks with Cockburn's masterful guitar work right where it belongs: at the heart of the record. Cockburn turned 72 this year, and the album speaks to some hard travelling (the opener, *States I'm In*), his mature spirituality (the stunningly gorgeous *Forty Years in the Wilderness*), and the rich, steady beat of love, hope, or whatever it is that underpins the complexity of



existence (the thump of the bass string in the instrumental title track).

And while many of us mellow out a bit as we age, Cockburn appears immune to such folly, at least judging from the urgency that courses through much of this album and likely reflects the fact that he now resides in Trump's America. *Bone On Bone*, in brief, has all the grind and sweet promise of living in a dark time.

— By Pat Langston

Shannon McNally

Black Irish (Compass)

Shannon McNally's latest,



Black Irish, is a respite from the sweet-voiced, youthful elements of Americana

so common recently. While McNally and producer Rodney Crowell establish the sound on *Black Irish* firmly in the Americana style, McNally's vocal style has a brassy, cool tone full of confidence, sounding like a woman in full, setting her apart from a number of her contemporaries.

Guy Clark's *Black Haired Boy* and The Band's classic tear-jerker *It Makes No Difference*, the former an easy-strummed rhythm buoyed by Hammond and Rhodes passes that give the old waltz a new life.

McNally and Crowell keep to a classic gritty feel throughout, and that serves McNally well. In some instances the repetitive call-and-response of her bluesier tunes, and the low-key turns take some impact from the songs, leaving the listener wishing for just a bit more.

— By Michael Dunn

The Mae Trio

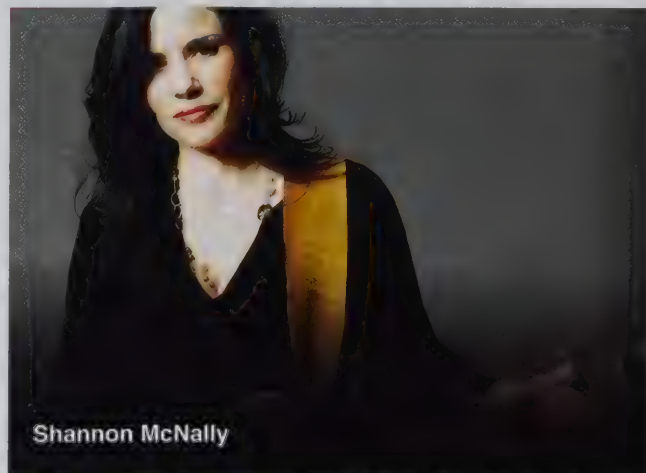
Take Care Take Cover (Independent)



These three Australian women took the plunge, travelling to

Nashville to record, and it has paid off big time, with a winner of a folk/roots album. Yes, they enlisted some talented instrumental help, including Darrell Scott, Molly Tuttle, and Viktor Krauss as well as producer Erick Jaskowiak, but the heavy hitters are just icing on the cake. The Mae Trio songs are powerful, the vocal harmonies soar, and their own instrumental prowess is impressive.

Like many contemporary string bands, there's plenty of



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(Rock Society Magazine)

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banjo and fiddle from sisters Elsie and Maggie Rigby, but underneath it all is Anita Hillman's driving cello, an instrument that has started appearing in roots music.

I like the fact that many of their songs take twists and turns rather than following the predictable patterns. As lyricists, the Rigby sisters are wise beyond their years. "The very heart my girl is a muscly creature, Its every hunger is a ruthless teacher" gets pretty close to McGarrigle territory.

Finally, they might have recorded in Nashville, but The Mae Trio have maintained their Australian identity. Not a trace of twang here, mate, just their own voices.

— By Mike Sadava

Doggerland

No Sadness or Farewell (Gammalthea)



This folk duo of Norway-based Englishman Richard

Burgess and Swede Anders Ådin, draws its name from the Atlantis-like sunken land under the North Sea that once connected Britain to Europe. Fittingly, Doggerland's music is drawn from the musical heritage of the North Sea and the lands around it. Burgess

is the lead singer and plays concertina, mandolin, and guitar while Åden plays guitar and hurdy-gurdy. On *No Sadness or Farewell*, they are joined by several guest musicians, including Jenny Gustafsson on fiddle, who frequently joins the duo at their live performances.

The album begins with the Swedish-Norwegian song *Jeg Gikk Meg Ut*, a tale of a broken heart and leaving home, followed by *Clearing the Track/Doggerland Reel*, a variant on the American song *Bulgine Run*. There are instrumental reels from Norway, Sweden, and Shetland, songs by Ewan MacColl and Richard Thompson, and even a lovely rendering of Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*, in addition to Doggerland's own material. The inclusion of so many types of songs and well-played instrumentals provides delightful variety and spice.

— By Gene Wilburn

The Wardens

Sleeping Buffalo (Independent)



The Wardens are a trio of actual park wardens based

in Banff National Park who combine fine three-part vocal harmonies with fingerstyle guitar, bass, and country/swing/bluegrass instrumentation in a delightful mix of poetic, historical narrative, and humour in their lyrics.

Sleeping Buffalo is their second full-length release following 2014's *Bear* and an EP in 2013. Founder Ray Schmidt on bass and mandolin combined with Scott Ward on fingerstyle guitar and Bradley Bischoff (of The Free Rangers)



Doggerland

playing lead and rhythm guitar make up the lineup. On this disc they have an array of fine backup musicians ranging from producer Leeroy Stagger, who recorded it at his home studio, Rebeltone Ranch, in Lethbridge, Bob Remington (writer and musician) on mandolin, to Calvin Volrath, who contributes some gorgeous fiddle on tracks such as *Across The River*, *Ya Ha Tinda*, and *The Ballad Of Bill Neish*.

All three gentleman pickers are also worthy songwriters and it's a toss-up as to who's the most accomplished in that field. Perhaps Bradley Bischoff leans towards the humour but Ray Schmidt and Scott Ward are equally poetic in songs such as Schmidt's title track (about the first free-range buffalo returning to the park this year since the 1800s) or Ward's ranch ode *Ya Ha Tinda*. All in all, it's a great addition to Alberta music, which Bischoff also commemorates in his *I Can Hear Alberta* track. Fine stuff!

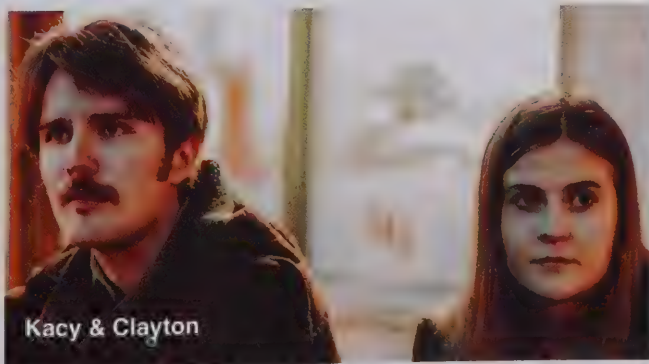
– By Barry Hammond

Kacy & Clayton

The Siren's Song (New West)



The musical palette is considerably widened on Kacy & Clayton's latest release, *The Siren's Song*. Moving along the lines of their 2015 breakthrough



Kacy & Clayton



Lal and Mike Waterson

Strange Country (produced by their bassist Shuyler Jansen), the Saskatchewan-based duo's third effort sees them integrating their longtime road rhythm section more fully in the arrangements, allowing cousins Kacy Anderson and Clayton Linthicum a little added musical playfulness to their approach.

White Butte Country (sung by Linthicum) might be the most obvious example of this. It's when Anderson takes over the reins on songs such as *A Lifeboat* that the alchemy is apparent.

The distinct Brit-folk influence is still there, though never in a heavy-handed way; *The Siren's Call* sounds like a stylistic continuation rather than slavish homage. Producer Jeff Tweedy seems to have kept interference to a minimum, trusting in the

band's instincts; a good decision based on the band's track record in the studio. Let's call this an early contender for album of the year in any genre.

– By Tom Murray

Lal & Mike Waterson

Bright Phoebus: Songs by Lal & Mike Waterson (Outside Music)



Lal and Mike, two members of the famed Yorkshire

family of singers, recorded *Bright Phoebus* in 1972. This 2017 re-release was my first time listening to the record in its entirety, and what a mystic wonder it is.

Favouring originals over the Watsons' traditional repertoire, *Bright Phoebus* kicks off with the acid pop *Rubber Band*, that wouldn't have been out of place on any number of summer-of-love epics. It is followed in disconcerting fashion by the dark, implacable *The Scarecrow* ("And to a stake they tied a child newborn.") that I'm certain inspired any number of Current 93 disturbances.

Lal's *Fine Horseman* is similar in tone but then later on we're treated to the pure country of *Danny Rose* and more

jaunty but sinister fairground folk (*Magical Man*). It's a rather breathtaking statement, artistically and quintessentially weird England (as if anything can be quintessentially weird...). The 1971 demos that close the album alone are worth the price of admission.

– By Richard Thornley

Robbie Banks

Foothills (Independent)



In 2015, a young Mr. Banks was nominated for Young

Performer of the Year at the Canadian Folk Music Awards. A good choice—he was very proficient at the guitar, banjo, and fiddle and had a love of traditional music from an even younger age.

Starting a big adventure, he moved to study folk music in Norway. He's still there, now working on a master's degree, but comes back to hometown Calgary in the summers and at Christmas. While he was home last winter, he went down to Nanton, AB, with a bare-bones band and recorded this project, *Foothills*.

What can I say? *Foothills* opens with a hauntingly satis-

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fyng version of *Geordie*. A lot of musicians are proficient at their instruments but the great ones have that intangible magic that makes everything sound right. Robbie Banks has this in spades.

There are traditional songs, some original songs, and a mixture of traditional melodies with original lyrics... and vice versa.

Songs about young love, songs about Gypsies, songs about crows and magpies—there is not a bum song in this collection. The arrangements are wonderful, laced with the tasteful pedal steel work of Charlie Hase, and root these traditional songs firmly not only to their origins but stamp them with a sound that also firmly roots them in Alberta. An artist with a unique voice is just starting to explore and work here.

So Robbie Banks's *Foothills* is a great beginning to what seems like will be a bright future in folk music. Time to get some sunglasses, Mr Banks. Can't wait to ear what you come up with next.

— By les siemieniuk

Wayne Muggridge

West Wind Blow (Independent)



This album of traditional Newfoundland tunes, folk-songs, and a couple of originals is a pleasure to listen to.

Muggridge has put together some very good players, including brother Bob and guest vocalist Elaine Clarke, to create a simple and spare recording that is lovely and listenable.

The liner notes tell the story of each piece and are a great companion to the music for learning a bit about Newfoundland's history.

Wayne Muggridge makes

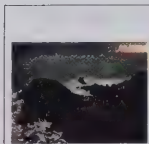


the decision to make his guitar the primary instrument, rather than fiddle or accordion as you most often hear in Newfoundland folk tunes. He and all the various players on the album are obviously talented and experienced musicians, playing with a clean simplicity that makes this a lovely CD to put on for a sunny afternoon drive.

— By Tanya Corbin

Fleet Foxes

Crack Up (Nonesuch)



There have been a few changes in the seven years since singer/songwriter Robin Pecknold ushered his band Fleet Foxes into the studio back in 2010 for the acclaimed *Helplessness Blues*. Like the departure of drummer Josh Tillman, who reinvented himself as Father John Misty, proceeding to eclipse his former band's popularity.

Add to that Pecknold's decision to put his band on hiatus while pursuing an undergraduate degree at Columbia, the New York university that clearly has had a huge affect on his lyric writing, mixing literary and geographical allusions with personal expressions of

disillusionment into a heady froth of words and perplexing song titles.

Musically, Pecknold and the Foxes mix it up, from world rhythms and psychedelia (*I Should See Memphis*) to nods at Krautrock and Philip Glass (*Kept Woman*), Beach Boys harmonies and beyond.

It's an earnest, heavy album that won't throw up any obvious anthems or singles, but repays over and over on further listening.

— By Tom Murray

Paul Kelly

Life Is Fine (Cooking Vinyl)



Since the 1980s and his emergence from Melbourne's pub rock scene, Paul Kelly has been recognized around the world and at home as a voice of Aus-

tralia. His 22 albums straddle folk, R&B, rock, and country, occasionally veering off into bluegrass and even dub.

Some of his numerous Top 40 singles are included in the Top 30 Australian songs of all time. He has been appointed an officer of the Order of Australia, written an autobiography, and had a documentary made him.

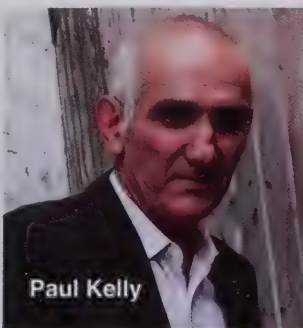
A fine career, and I presume a very good life. But what now, has it all been done?

Not quite. *Life Is Fine*, though, and Mr. Kelly returns to his pop/R&B roots for this rollicking, jolly collection featuring, as always, more than pretty decent songwriting, updating a Roy Orbison song, *Leah: the Sequel*, and setting a Langston Hughes poem to music.

I even learned a new word from the song title *Petrichor*. It's "a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather." Cool.

This is a fine collection of songs and a great listening experience. In addition, *Life Is Fine* is Paul Kelly's first No. 1 album in Australia, ever (it displaced Ed Sheeran). Life is, indeed, exceedingly fine for Paul Kelly and his audience.

— By les siemieniuk



Various Artists

The Rough Guide to Jug Band Blues

(Rough Guide)



If you know nothing about jug band music, you're in for a pleasant surprise from this expertly chronicled, 25-track compilation. Spanning its heyday from the 1920s through to the 1930s, this largely unheralded musical form had its origins in Memphis and much of the south. Like that feeling of unchecked, unbridled fun that came with one's first year of university or first time away from home, these "jug bands" were all about fun, irreverence and bawdy good times—for the players and audience alike.

Not only can you connect the spirit of this music directly to the blues, but to the beginnings of R&B, if not rap and hip-hop itself. More than that, these bands are a scream to listen to and, regardless of how crudely they may have been recorded, there's no denying there's a party going on with each distinct approach.

Largely do-it-yourselfers, many of these acts weren't necessarily skilled musicians nor did they have much to play with. Beginning with a glass or stoneware jug (capable of a wide variety of sounds based on how full or empty they were), washboards, guitars, spoons, kazoos, and harmonicas joined stomping feet, clapping hands, and an unmistakable *joie de vivre* to create variations on blues, ragtime, jazz, and country swing—designed to entertain their drinking public in no uncertain terms.

From the Memphis Sheiks to lesser-known players such as the Seven Gallon Jug Band, you'll find a cornucopia of sounds to more than tickle any

fancy. Take the hilarious Daddy Stovepipe and Mississippi Sarah and *The Spasm* and you'll swear off marriage for life. From the tortured vocals of Jack Kelly (and His South Memphis Jug Band) to the sweet vocals of Clarence Williams in the Alabama Jug Band's Dixie-land-flavoured *Sugar Blues*, a lot of ground is covered.

That's Jimmie Rodgers's yodel paired with the Louisville Jug Band on the so-sad *My Good Gal's Gone Blues*. Nor is there any denying the strong hooks associated with *Tear It Down* by Bob Coleman and The Cincinatti Jug Band. Jed Davenport and his Beale Street Jug Band explode all over the frenzied harp, fiddle, and jug-driven *Beale Street Breakdown*.

This collection is compulsory homework and well worth the studying. You won't know what hit you—in a good way.

— By Eric Thom

Pippa Reid-Foster

Driftwood Harp (Independent)



From Scotland's west coast comes this performer, composer, and teacher of the clarsach, the Scottish harp. Reid-Foster is a music graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and



Lisa LeBlanc

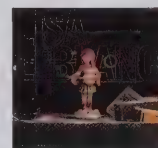
amply plies her skills on her debut *Driftwood Harp*, which combines new compositions and arrangements, all inspired by folklore, myths, and history of the Argyll area.

She takes the listener on a journey through Scotland's mythical past. *The Mermaid Song* evokes images of waves swirling on the rocks and sirens calling. *Steamboats on Crinan Canal / The Herring Lassies of Argyll* summon up visions of a bygone era of stately steam vessels and chatty fish filleters on a busy quayside. This is as fine an album of solo clarsach music as you're likely to hear.

— By Tim Readman

Lisa LeBlanc

Why Do You Wanna Leave, Runaway Queen (Independent)



Ms. LeBlanc is an interesting Canadian mix. She's Acadian. She

sings in French and English. She plays the banjo and mandolin and has a backing band that rocks and strains the definitions of genres. It's acoustic, it's rock'n'roll, it's bluegrass, it's folk.

It's all that and more. It's a mixture of songs that roll over you and please and confuse sometimes. A couple of solo banjo and one guitar solo song mixed with full-tilt rock'n'roll, some pedal steel country, and a couple of bluegrass numbers. Above all, it's delivered with passion, skill—and a nervy confidence.

I like being challenged in my listening. Ms. LeBlanc does it in spades, including a banjo-led version of Motorhead's *Ace of Spades*. And as of this writing, *Why Do You Wanna Leave, Runaway Queen* is on the short list for this year's Polaris prize. 'Nuff said.

— By les siemieniuk



Pippa Reid-Foster

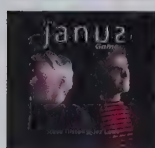
The Pitmen Poets

The Pitmen Poets: LIVE (Independent)

More Black Diamonds (Independent)

Steve Tilston and Jez Lowe

The Janus Game (Tantobie Records)



Here are three albums that you'll want to hear.

First, take four fine singers from the northeast of England—Billy Mitchell (guitar, mandolin, harmonica), Bob Fox (guitar), Benny Graham (accordion), and Jez Lowe (guitar, cittern, harmonica). Set them to work celebrating the triumphs, tragedy, humour, and hard times of that corner of England's coal mining tradition.

Listen as they wrap their voices and harmonies around the words that tell the stories that were once of everyday life and have fast become consigned to history, museums, and memories. I'm sure you will be very impressed as they weave their magic!

It all began with a highly successful U.K. tour in 2016, which spawned the *LIVE*

album. *LIVE* features classics such as Lowe's *These Coal Town Days*, Mitchell's *Devil's Ground*, and Fox's take on the trad *The Row Between The Cages*. *More Black Diamonds* (2017) is a further collection of 15 great songs, recorded around the kitchen table. Graham's version of *When Geordie Thoo and I was Young* and *Birth of the Lad* are two of the brightest shining of these gems, along with Lowe's title track.

But wait, there's more! Take two of the U.K. acoustic/folk scene's finest songwriters—Steve Tilston and Jez Lowe—put their heads together, and *The Janus Game* is the thought-provoking result. *The Bonnie Bunch of Roses* is a song about Napoleon's demise where the state of England, Scotland, and Ireland are looked at through a more contemporary lens. *Crosses, Crescents and Stars* takes a pot shot at religious wars, and brings some much-needed common sense to bear on the topic. *Tattered and Torn* is another look at contemporary Britain, a pensive paean to its potential demise. There's also a tribute to Wizz Jones on *The Strings That Wizz Once Strummed*. The title track describes the duplicity of two-



faced politicians. It's a stellar example of collaboration between two excellent songwriters and musicians.

Finally, take out your wallet—and you know what to do next!

— By Tim Readman

Tom Russell

Folk Hotel (Frontera Records)



Tom Russell really doesn't like to be pigeonholed.

He appears to only have one rule in his artistic vision, and that's the primacy of the story; anything else is fair game, especially the music.

On *Folk Hotel* he makes this very clear on songs such as *The Day They Dredged The Liffey/The Banks of Montauk/The Road to Santa Fe-O*, where he wanders from poetry to sea shanty as mood progresses, as well as the old cowboy lament that is *I'll Never Leave These Old Horses*. He pens tall tales

(*The Rooftops of Copenhagen*) and empathic character scrawlings (*Harlan Clancy*), tips a hat to Dylan with a version of *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* that pulls in his old buddy Joe Ely, and duets with Eliza Gilkyson on the Dylan Thomas tribute *The Sparrow of Swansea*.

Folk Hotel is a beautifully put together set of songs that show Russell at the top of his game.

— By Tom Murray

Steve Earle

So You Wannabe An Outlaw (Warner Bros)



Steve Earle takes us back to his Texas roots with his latest album,

So You Wannabe An Outlaw. Harkening back to the classic outlaw country of Waylon Jennings, whose guitar style and sound deliberately resonate throughout the album, this latest effort is Steve Earle's acknowledgment of where he comes



from, and who he learned from along the way.

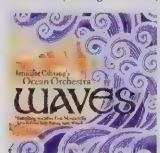
The Steve Earle snarliness is well known and shows up particularly in the first half of the record, which is a hard-driving assault in the best way music can be. The latter half of the record is more introspective and quiet by comparison, culminating in *Goodbye Michelangelo*, an ode to Guy Clarke.

This album is a welcome one for Earle's longtime fans, and music aficionados could spend days listening to the hints of homage and throwbacks to the greats of the genre.

— By Tanya Corbin

Jennifer Cutting's Ocean Orchestra

Waves (SunSign Records)



A founding member of the celebrated folk-rock ensemble The New Saint George, Jennifer Cutting learned her craft under the discerning eye of the great English folklorist and singer A.L. (Bert) Lloyd. She began *Waves*, apparently, in the 1990s and it includes such prominent guests as Clive Gregson and Polly Bolton, bolstered by Cutting's Ocean Orchestra—a sterling amalgamation of fiddle, bouzouki, accordion, guitars, Highland bagpipes, bass, and drums.

Toss in the gorgeous vocals of her old Saint George cohort Lisa Moscatiello on the likes of the gripping *Crane And Tower*, coupled with Cutting's bold, electric instrumentation on such traditional tunes as *Rocking The Baby/ The Curlew*, and new waves never sounded so appealing.

Largely, the backbone of this disc lies in the Celtic tradition, although the Steeleye Span canon certainly inspired the likes



of Cutting's originals *Johnny Has Gone Electric* and *Wheel of Fortune*. All in all, it's a highly engaging recording—a voyage of discovery, if you will, into the unending possibilities of unfettered folk.

— By Martha Watts

Durham County Poets

Grimshaw Road (Independent)



This album had my ear from the spooky, swampy blues of the opening title track. The lost soul looking into the black water, being handed a bottle by the devil himself, punctuated by

searing slide guitar.

But then there's a jump blues with horns, a jazz-inspired tune, a hard electric blues, and so on. With every member contributing songs, and a few multi-instrumentalists, this quintet from the Chateauguay Valley in southern Quebec explores many nooks and crannies of the blues, and they do it with aplomb.

They're all tasteful musicians with a light touch. The band is anchored by lead vocalist Kevin Harvey, who has to be one of Canada's most underrated blues singers, who has a style that reminds me of Eric Bibb. One of the two covers, Blind Willie Johnson's *On Your*

Bond, features a memorable duet between Harvey and guest Suzie Vinnick. David Whyte's *Outside Cat* has a large dollop of Louis Jordan influence. So much variety but somehow it all comes together, and the whole is much more than the sum of the parts.

— By Mike Sadava

Calan

Solomon (Sain)



Welsh band Calan could likely be classified as traditional folk with strong pop influences. *Solomon* kicks off with *Kan*, a



jig-time spree that includes harp, pipes, fiddle, and jaunty vocal. *Ryan Jigs* has the band going through its Celtic instrumental paces with everyone taking turns to impress. The hit should be *Apparition*, which is a blend of Welsh and Irish traditions—a radio hit if ever I heard one!

Their Welshness is on full display on *Pe Cawn I Hon (If She Were Mine)*, with electric guitar and vocal in the spotlight, and on the more folksy *Yr Eneth Ga-dd Ei Gwrthod (The Rejected Maiden)* with harp and violin being featured. *Dennis, Polca!* includes brass and more than a nod to Russian music and is one to get the party started. Calan play music that is youthful, enthusiastic, and skilled, that will please no matter which side of the pop/folk line you stand.

— By Tim Readman

Eric Sommer

Brooklyn Bolero (Independent)



Based in Boston, singer/songwriter Eric Sommer seems bent

on baffling people like me. Bursting out of the gate with the rough'n'tumble *Red Dress*, Sommer, percussionist Jim Oakley, and bassist Zach Smith present a spiky, primal, blues-rock assault leaning on steely, in-your-face, electric slide guitar and group vocals.

Yet, nothing quite prepares you for *Cover My Soul*, a dreamy little shuffle highlighting Sommers's guitar skills, accentuated on acoustic guitar, together with a rural sound that fits his precarious vocal style.

As Sommer and band speed things up or slow them down, there's no denying their skills with a well-placed hook, surrounding it with tasteful playing and almost-there vocals that, alone, exhibit their own charm.



Closing out on the comparably more electric rocker *Hold Your Hand*, this 29-minute teaser demands more meat.

Solid musical skills are evident and it would seem Sommer & Co. can choose any road they'd prefer to go down. All that's needed is a less ambiguous approach and a little more proof for this pudding. With a range suggesting everything from Dr. Hook to Michael Chapman (that's just for starters), there's more blues than 'bolero' to be found.

— By Eric Thom

Tinariwen

Elwan (Anti-)



Tinariwen's seventh album is a return to form after the lacklustre *Tassili* and *Enmarr*.

Tiwâyyen kicks things off with their signature guitar crunch and percussive throb-throb. *Nizzagh Ijbal* slows things down, leaving the lyrics instead to rip at your heart. They sing, "*Fighter, combatant, come this way, come and rediscover your loves and unity*," reminding you that the group's homeland is in flames and *Elwan* was recorded in exile. *Ittus* is, by contrast, a spare and haunting song of defiance

("I ask you, what is our goal. It is the unity of our nation and to carry our standard high.")

There are some star turns from a small cadre of American musicians but honestly, Tinariwen in full flight, as we find them here, need little help from their friends. Would that the same could be said of the Tuareg people.

— By Richard Thornley

Sam Baker

Land of Doubt (Independent)



He's described his latest effort as "cinematic," but *Land of Doubt* also reflects Sam Baker's other occupation, painter. The Austin-based singer/songwriter goes for impressionistic lyrics over sparse instrumental back-

ground, alluding where other writers simply state, colouring in tone portraits that depend on the listener filling in the background, as on the melancholy *Feast of St. Valentines*.

Say the Right Words is a mournful toast from parents to their daughter on her wedding day, *Same Kind of Blue* a character sketch of a young man returning from Vietnam.

Baker is classified as a folk and country musician but the music on *Land of Doubt* evades genre descriptors, resting best under the heading of Americana; sweeping string arrangements, gorgeous trumpet strains by Dan Mitchell, Baker's fingerpicked guitar and weathered voice all combine for a sui generis sound.

— By Tom Murray





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The Waifs

The Waifs

Ironbark (Compass)



Twenty-five years as a band is an incredible accomplishment, and The Waifs have long plied their good-natured folk sound from their native Australia across the globe. Awash in sweetly sung harmonies, and sunny rhythms, *Ironbark* sees them celebrating a quarter century together with a massive trove of music—25 songs that find the band exploring a number of different elements brought together by the harmonies of sisters Vikki Thorne and Donna Simpson, and fellow songwriter Josh Cunningham, along with longtime bandmates Ben Franz and David Ross McDonald.

I Won't Go Down finds the three vocalists harmonizing altogether for the majority of the song, a dark number with minimal percussion, and bowed upright bass,

while an echoing guitar comes in late, adding another nice harmonic element to the fingerpicked rhythm guitar. Thorn's lead vocal *Amazing Everything* is a standout, beginning with quiet grace, before reaching and nearly breaking in the best way, starting with fingerpicked melancholy before the harmonized refrain and chiming guitars lift the song to another level. Simpson's *Syria* is a dark study of hard sought refuge from the evils of war, evoking desperate imagery in the depiction of submergence in the Mediterranean, asking mournfully, "What's a man to do when everything's been taken from you? Nails in bombs in the dying sun, what's a man to do?"

The Waifs conjure a number of moods and ideas through the lengthy running time of *Ironbark*; it's a massive collection when one considers the speed at which artists churn out product but the sound of the band

is even throughout, with atmospheric elements added to their acoustic tones, and the sort of intimate harmony that can only come from years of playing together. The band could have split *Ironbark* into volumes and had two excellent records, though as it stands, the album shows the closeness that comes from playing music together for so long.

— By Michael Dunn

I Draw Slow

Turn Your Face To The Sun (Compass)



It's not often that acoustic/roots/Americana music is produced by a Celtic band from Dublin but that's exactly what's going on in *I Draw Slow*. Music is such a melting pot of styles and influences that it shouldn't be a surprise anymore but this hard-to-put-your-finger-on blend is what makes the band interesting.

The Celtic influence is

still there, especially in fiddle player Adrian Hart's work, but so is old-time country. Fronted by the brother/sister combo of Dave and Louise Holden, who also write the songs, the group's other strength is their lyrics. Their words are poetic but put together with unique and unexpected stresses, sometimes with internal rhymes and sometimes words added on at the end of a line which lead into the next.

Their sound is gentle but mesmerizing in its unexpected directions and changes, such as a slightly Latin trumpet sound in *Maria*, Konrad Liddy's loping bass and Dave Keegan's anvil percussion in *Tell The Girls*, or the intertwined banjo and fiddle racing in the traditional *Twin Sisters*.

Surface simple but with complex nuances, their sound is always rooted in the guitar and banjo picking and strumming by Dave and Colin Derham, with Louise's voice floating nimbly over everything in and out of Dave's harmonies. It's a disc that needs to be listened to a few times to be fully appreciated but one to reveal many hidden depths and treasures.

It's definitely a keeper.

– By Barry Hammond



A.J. Croce

Just Like Medicine (Compass)



On his ninth full-length, *Just Like Medicine*, singer-songwriter

A.J. Croce and producer Dan Penn assembled a stellar cast of heavy hitting soul and roots music legends including Steve Cropper, David Hood, Vince Gill, and The Muses Shoals Horns, and recording straight to tape in an effort to recreate the warmth and tone of classic soul.

Just Like Medicine has a noticeable warmth and proximity,

kicking off with the dark and brooding *Gotta Get Outta My Head*, led by swampy percussion, while the slide guitar of Colin Linden lends it a dark Southern Gothic feeling, before the tune kicks into a gospel push in the chorus. There's an element of Sam Cooke in the classy rhythm n' blues of *Cures Just Like Medicine*, and its chorus is brought to life by ascending gospel harmonies from The McCrary Sisters that might remind some listeners of *I'm Your Man*-era Leonard Cohen. *Full Up* has a bluesy Randy Newman vibe, hinging on a rollicking piano set to a barrelhouse shuffle.

With all the musical history and pedigree on *Just Like Medicine*, it's impossible to not enjoy the sound of the album, but even the warmest audio and sweetest classic soul tones have a hard time bringing life to what is ultimately a lacklustre collection of mostly reflective songs, that tend to focus on mundane universal feelings of relationship strife, while never really hitting on the progressive bent that soul music always has always had at its core.

– By Michael Dunn

Ross Couper & Tom Oakes

Fiddle and Guitar (Haystack Records)



Ross Couper and Tom Oakes have played a great many gigs together

and it shows on this, their first release. Couper hails from the Shetlands and may be better known to readers as the fiddler with the Peatbog Faeries. Oakes is a Devonian and a consummate flautist, but it is his guitar slinging which is featured here.

He drives the uptempo tunes with energy and verve, giving Couper rock-solid backing to fly over on tunes such as *Shetland Swing*. When things slow down, they show their ability to play beautifully and serenely, as evidenced on *Road To Loch* and *The Last Gasp*. Their starts and stops and rhythmic turns and twists almost venture into prog rock territory. This is the sound of two fine musicians, who complement each other very well, pulling out all the stops. Any potential guitar/fiddle hopefuls would do well to listen and learn!

– By Tim Readman

"I love the name of this magazine. *Penguin Eggs* is one of my fave songs by one of my fave singers ever, Nic Jones" – Christy Moore

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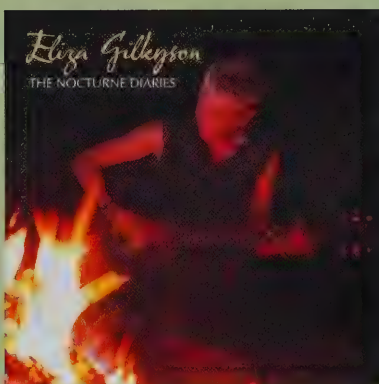
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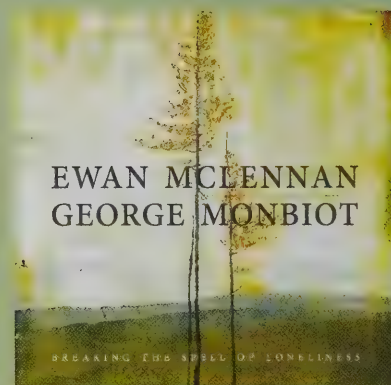
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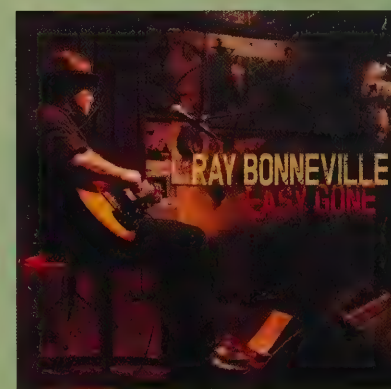
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Books



Lightfoot

By Nicholas Jennings

ISBN: 9780735232556 / Viking / Penguin Random House / 320 pages / hardcover / \$35.00



Calvinist spiritual man, wracked with Protestant guilt over past sins he'd committed against his

wives and children? Iron-willed control freak who erupted in rage when forced outside his comfort zone? Ambitious professional man determined to make it to the top of his profession and stay there by maintaining his standards of craft and performance? Shy small-town Canadian boy who used alcohol and music to make social connections he was normally too timid to pursue? Outdoorsman and athlete who preferred to be out in nature than in the cities? Romantic poetic icon who chronicled his country's history, political transgressions, landscapes, seascapes, and the intimate relationships of himself and its citizens better than any other musician in the past 100 years?

Singer/songwriter/performer Gordon Lightfoot could be any of these, all of these, or none of the above. Nicholas Jennings, music critic for *Maclean's* magazine from 1980 to 2000, has

reviewed thousands of records, profiled many of the world's leading artists, from Oscar Peterson, Paul Simon, Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney to Joni Mitchell, Sarah McLachlan, and Diana Krall. His previous books include *Before The Gold Rush* and *Fifty Years Of Music: The Story Of EMI Music Canada*.

Now, Jennings turns his attention on Gordon Lightfoot, a music industry legend and one notoriously protective of his private life. That Lightfoot co-operated with Jennings, sitting for many interviews over a dozen years and gave him full access to other people and musicians in his private life speaks volumes of the trust and faith he had for Jennings to get the story right.

That faith has been rewarded. Lightfoot is as detailed and fact-filled biography as any fan or music lover could hope for, but one which has also been skilfully edited to keep the story moving and down to a reasonable length so the casual reader would also be entertained.

There are such little-known gems as Lightfoot's participation in barber shop quartets when still in high school and his studies in jazz at the Westlake College Of Modern Music in Hollywood. Also covered are intimate details of all three of his marriages and the children from those marriages (and many other dalliances which didn't lead to marriage), as well as the origins and circumstances of many of his most popular songs and the details of the recording sessions at which they were immortalized.

(One of this critic's favourite details is there are not one but two different disco-style versions of *If You Could Read My Mind*).

It also covers the many awards, prizes, honours, and

distinctions that both he and his body of work have achieved as befitting a giant figure in the music industry. It's a book which will satisfy the ardent fan or the person who's only heard such classics as *The Canadian Railroad Trilogy*, *Early Morning Rain*, *Sundown*, *Rainy Day People*, *If You Could Read My Mind*, *I'm Not Sayin'*, *Bitter Green*, *Minstrel Of The Dawn*, *Ribbon Of Darkness*, *Song For A Winter's Night* or dozens of others on the radio, in a bar, or via the countless cover versions by other artists that exist.

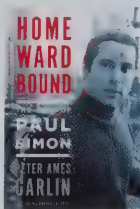
This book is the story of the man who started it all in the days of folk and put Canada on the map (along with Joni Mitchell) for songwriters. A monument for a monument!

— By Barry Hammond

Homeward Bound

By Peter Ames Carlin

ISBN: 978-1-62779-034-5 / Henry Holt and Company / hard cover / 415 pages / \$39.99 Cdn



This is a book that's been long overdue. In an era of songwriters that's included Lennon and McCartney, Jagger and Richards, Bob Dylan, Chuck Berry, Leiber and Stoller, Ray Davies, Brian Wilson, Warren Zevon, Jackson Browne, Don Henley and Glen Frey, there's a towering figure that hasn't been written about enough. That figure is Paul Simon.

Maybe because he's such a mass of contradictions: a shy, internal boy who was also an athlete, a travelling folkie who was also the president of his fraternity, a loner who was one half of a notoriously feuding duo, a generous family man who could cut people dead if he didn't like something they

said to him, a depressive and rebellious artist who also had the business sense of an old-time music mogul—all these tendencies were present in the remarkable person who has had a legendary and lengthy career as a singer/songwriter unlike anyone else in his generation.

Peter Ames Carlin, who has also written biographies of Lenny Bruce and Bruce Springsteen, brings an admiring but also penetrating and cynical eye as he examines the life story of this complicated subject. It's an informative book but also a perplexing one, as elusive and confusing as its central character.

It's all here: his childhood, his friends and influences, the stories of the songs, his complicated private life, the ongoing bond and battle with Art Garfunkel, all the changes in direction along the way, the praise and animosities of those who worked with him.

I suspect critics and biographers will be examining this life for decades to come, trying to define what made the man tick, but I doubt they'll get much closer to the core than Carlin does. For a life lived in the glare of publicity, it seems as mysterious and unknowable as one from a different time. A complex book for a complex subject but the reader comes away as informed as it's probably possible to be. An interesting read for sure.

— By Barry Hammond





Abigail Lapell

Elle enveloppe ses chansons d'une chape de mystère, les habillant de nuances étranges évoquant la musique traditionnelle.

**Par Pat Langston.
Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard**

Vous souvenez-vous des manifestations pour le sommet du G20 à Toronto en 2010? Oui, c'est vrai, il y a eu beaucoup de manifestations au fil des ans, mais celle-ci, en voulant attirer l'attention sur la pauvreté et les déprédations d'un capitalisme effréné, fut particulièrement marquante puisqu'elle a entraîné la plus

grande arrestation de masse de l'histoire canadienne : 1 000 personnes furent arrêtées.

L'auteure-compositrice-interprète Abigail Lapell se remémore l'événement dans *Hostage Town* une chanson puissante figurant sur son deuxième album *Hide Nor Hair*. Le premier vers de la chanson, *I'm trying to find my friends / Swallowed up by the streets again* [J'essaie de trouver mes amis, avalés par les rues de nouveau] et son rythme changeant donnent le ton de la chanson, qui ne parle pas tant des objectifs de justice sociale de la manifestation que des bouleversements qu'elle a connus ce jour-là.

«Nous nous sommes rassemblés dans un esprit de solidarité, mais nous avons fini par nous sentir comme des étrangers», se souvient Abigail, qui n'a pas fait partie des personnes arrêtées. Les manifestants peuvent parfois être fermés et elle et ses amis ont fini par se sentir exclus.

«Nous avons essayé de trouver des gens avec qui on connectait, notre tribu. Nous

étions comme des touristes qui évoluaient dans un paysage surréel, déconnectés du monde.»

Hostage Town parle d'un événement spécifique, mais c'est le genre de chanson à laquelle tout le monde peut s'identifier. Elle parle de ce moment où vous vous sentez seul soudainement, quand vous réalisez que les personnes qui vous entourent poursuivent des buts tout à fait différents des vôtres.

On reconnaît aussi le style de chanson impressionniste, à la mélodie complexe propre à Abigail Lapell, plus désireuse de créer une ambiance, une expérience et une émotion que de raconter une histoire. Pour elle, la mélodie arrive spontanément alors que les paroles sont beaucoup plus difficiles à trouver, voilà pourquoi ses paroles se présentent comme une suite d'images concrètes qui l'aident à fixer ses chansons mélodieuses et évocatrices.

Ce genre de paroles cadre avec les précautions qu'elle prend pour ne pas trop se révéler en musique. Il se peut qu'elle com-

mence à écrire une chanson pour exprimer sa tristesse, mais «je finis par l'envelopper et la couvrir d'images successives. Je veux être honnête dans mon écriture, mais parfois l'honnêteté, ça peut devenir quêtaine.»

Ces principes d'écriture contribuent à l'homogénéité de *Hide Nor Hair*. Cependant, Abigail a été étonné de découvrir un autre fil d'Ariane dans ses chansons, mais seulement après la fin de l'album. Elle a remarqué qu'elle parlait souvent de voiliers et du côté passager des voitures. Puisqu'elle a écrit ses chansons sur un certain nombre d'années lorsqu'elle se déplaçait ou à une époque où elle n'avait pas d'appartement, ses allées et venues ont fini par devenir un thème dans plusieurs de ses chansons.

Abigail grandit à North York, une banlieue de Toronto. Elle commence à jouer dans les soirées micro ouvert au populaire Kensington Market à Toronto, puis elle passe plusieurs années à Montréal à partir de l'an 2000. C'est là qu'elle poursuit des études culturelles à l'Université de Concordia, joue dans des groupes de rock et vibre au rythme de la scène musicale indépendante (pensons à Arcade Fire) qui a contribué à définir la ville pendant un certain temps.

Elle déménage ensuite à Hamilton, ON, pour faire une maîtrise en études culturelles et théorie critique à l'Université McMaster. Elle aurait pu choisir d'étudier davantage, mais a conclu que cela ne mènerait pas à une carrière prospère. «Si je dois travailler d'arrache-pied pour ne pas faire d'argent, autant être musicienne», s'est-elle dit, ce qui s'est avéré être un bon choix.

Son nouvel album, le premier, *Great Survivor*, paru en 2011, dévoile de nouveaux éléments à chaque écoute et lui vaut le Prix Colleen Peterson de composition de chanson pour sa chanson *Jordan* en 2016.

Cette chanson a également été écrite loin de chez elle lors d'une retraite d'écriture dans une petite cabane dans une forêt du Michigan. Une petite rivière appelée la rivière Jordan traversait la forêt et à l'intérieur de la cabane se trouvait un vieux piano décrépit. Bien qu'elle ait étudié l'instrument étant jeune, elle a composé sa première chanson au piano à ce moment, en trouvant la mélodie sur les quelques touches qui fonctionnaient encore.

L'air qu'elle a créé est légèrement mystérieux et optimiste et s'appuie sur les résonances profondes des cordes du piano pour évoquer des sabots de chevaux retentissants, la forêt et le fleuve biblique du Jourdain.

D'autres images de la nature surgissent ailleurs sur *Hide Nor Hair*. La montagne, le désert, la mer et l'autoroute pour s'y rendre sont à la base de la sombre chanson *Flag Song*, inspirée par le drapeau qu'elle a vu en visitant la Jordanie. On lui avait fait remarquer que ce drapeau détenait le record Guinness du plus gros drapeau du monde, ce qui l'avait dérangée. «Comment peuvent-ils savoir qu'il n'y en a pas un plus gros ailleurs?», demande-t-elle avec le même esprit logique et sceptique qu'on décèle en écoutant ses chansons.

Le sentiment tendre qu'elle éprouve pour la nature, excluant les gros drapeaux, lui

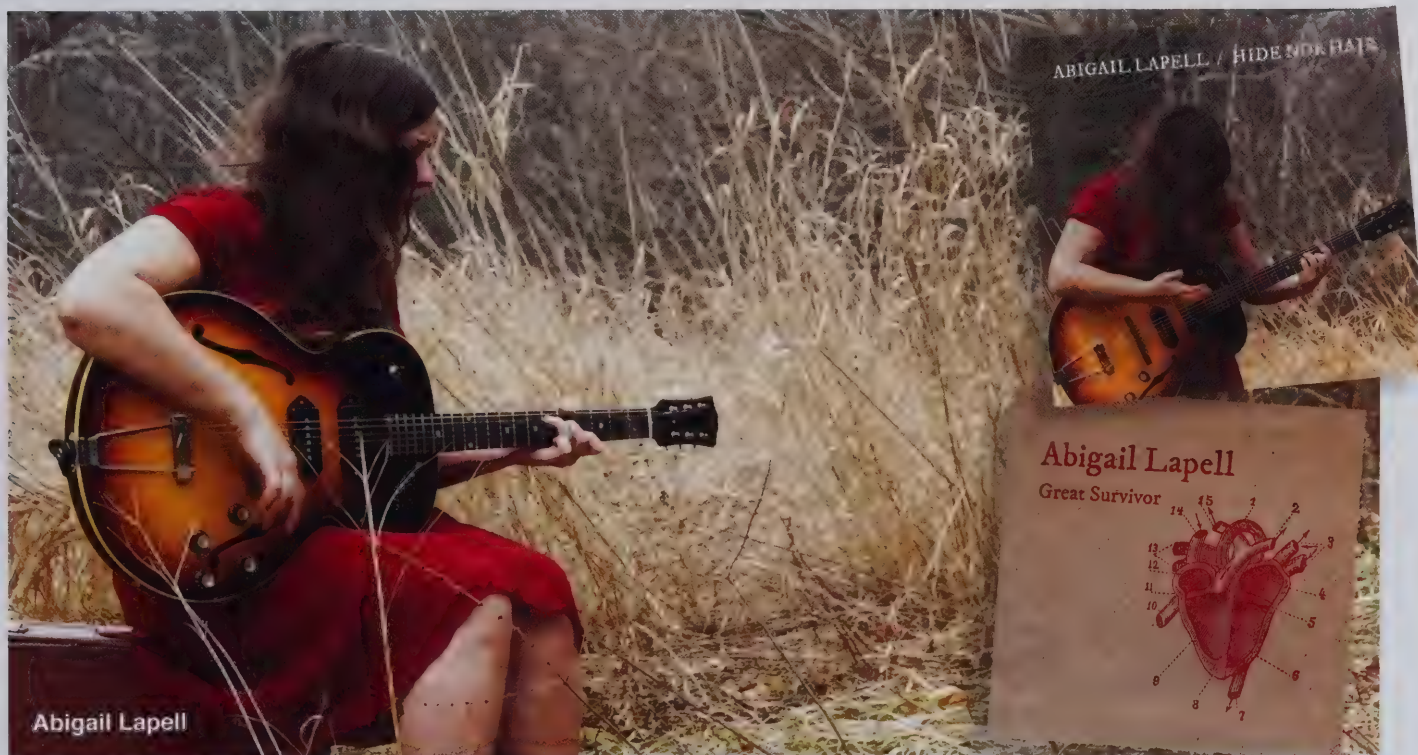
vient des années passées en ville. «Maintenant, je passe autant de temps que possible à la campagne. Je sens que le fait d'être dans le bois est bon pour la santé mentale. Dans la vie, il faut entrer dans une case, mais dans les bois, il n'y a pas d'angle droit, aucune ligne droite. Être dans un endroit aux contours irréguliers me plaît beaucoup.»

Des contours irréguliers, voilà une bonne description de ce qui se passe dans certaines des chansons d'Abigail. On n'arrive jamais vraiment à catégoriser sa musique, mais parfois, les accords d'une musique traditionnelle se font entendre. Cela se produit dans la première pièce, *Diamond Girl*, même si cela semble plus être une question d'attitude, et un peu de phrasé, mais dès que vous y portez trop attention, l'ombre est déjà disparue. L'ombre apparaît ailleurs aussi, furtivement, nous donnant envie plus qu'autre chose.

«J'ai beaucoup été exposée à la musique traditionnelle ces dernières années», explique-t-elle. «Elle est sombre et audacieuse et cool, pas le genre de musique traditionnelle populaire avec des jolies harmonies et des paroles intelligentes et toutes ces choses que je n'aime pas.»

Ce qu'elle aime, ce sont les vieilles «ballades des îles Britanniques où un changement discordant ou dissonant survient et propulse la composition dans un territoire étrange».

Pas étonnant qu'elle ait eu envie de s'engager dans le territoire inattendu du G20 pour écrire une chanson.





Hommage aux Aînés

Issu de la capitale de la chanson traditionnelle québécoise, ce quintette se réjouit de son héritage.

Par Yves Bernard

Dans la région de Lanaudière au Québec, c'est un groupe culte. Depuis vingt-sept ans, Gaston Lepage et Serge Thériault, deux artistes exceptionnels, chantent ensemble et animent les destinées d'Hommage aux Aînés, le groupe de chansons à répondre qui a six disques à son actif et qui incarne l'esprit d'une région en chantant des chansons telles qu'on le faisait à Saint-Côme, la capitale québécoise de la chanson traditionnelle.

« C'est pas mal toutes les familles de Saint-Côme qui chantent des chansons à répondre dans les partys. On est tombés dedans quand on était petit et ça n'a jamais

lâché. Dans l'autobus qui ramenait nos enfants à l'école dans les années 1960, ça chantait », raconte Gaston. Le phénomène est à ce point vivant que d'autres s'en sont inspirés. En 2008, l'organisation du festival Mémoire et Racines a même désigné Saint-Côme comme capitale de la chanson traditionnelle québécoise et le conseil municipal de l'endroit a donné un statut légal à cette manifestation de son patrimoine en identifiant « la pratique de la chanson traditionnelle comme un élément significatif de son patrimoine et de son identité ».

Pour quelle raison le patrimoine est-il si bien préservé à Saint-Côme, un village de Lanaudière composé d'une population qui oscille entre 1500 et 2000 personnes? Peut-être parce qu'il est situé à la fin d'une route? Quoi qu'il en soit, plusieurs artistes ont émergé de là: Baqghus, Légende, la Giroflée, les Trois B et la Galvaude, pour ne nommer qu'eux. Il y a aussi les frères Beaudry: Éric qui joue dans De Temps Antan et Simon dans le Vent du Nord.

À Saint-Côme, on chante autant qu'avant, mais qu'en est-il dans les villages

avoisinants? « À Sainte-Thérèse, c'est pas pire. Dans le bout de Sainte-Marie-Salomé, ça brasse pas mal. À Saint-Jacques, c'est toutes des familles acadiennes comme dans le coin de Saint-Côme », répond Gaston. Mais, quelles sont ces familles? « À Sainte-Marie-Salomé, c'est Marc Brien qui avait un solide répertoire. À Saint-Liguori, il y a les Laporte. Pien et Rémi qui sont des musiciens bien connus, viennent de cette famille-là ». Et Serge Thériault, qui a participé aussi à l'entree, en rajoute: « Au même endroit, il y avait la famille Cantin, ils sont tous des musiciens ». Le regretté Gilles, qui est l'un de ses plus célèbres fils, a fait partie d'Hommage aux Aînés et de la Bottine souriante, entre autres. La scène principale de Mémoire et Racines porte maintenant son nom.

Quant à Serge, il retient plusieurs de ses principales influences dans sa famille: « Tous les cousins de mon père chantaient. Mon père chantait aussi, mais il est mort assez jeune. Il vient de Saint-Côme. Ma vie de garçon, ça ne s'est tout pas fait dans les chansons, mais à un moment donné,

j'allais dans les veillées ça a commencé». D'autres influences? «*Jean-Louis, Gilles et Aurèle Thériault. Après ça, il y a eu Gilles Cantin qui nous a bien impressionnés, c'est lui qui a fait démarrer le folklore dans notre coin avec la Bottine. À part ça il y en a eu plusieurs autres, la famille Bordeleau et même dans la famille proche de Gaston ça chantait plus que chez nous*».

Gaston Lepage le relance: «*Nous autres, il y a de la musique des deux côtés. Les Lepage, c'est des musiciens, mais du côté des Gagné, c'était surtout de la chanson. Je chante donc des chansons à répondre puis que je suis tout petit. Quand j'ai commencé à jouer de la musique de danse, dès qu'on avait fini notre veillée, on allait dans une maison et on chantait le restant de la nuit. À Saint-Côme, ça marche encore fort. Mes enfants chantent, la petite fille de Serge chante et les enfants de Jean-François Branchaud ont commencé à chanter*».

Dans *Hommage aux Aînés* Jean-François remplace maintenant Michel Bordeleau. Chanteur-violoneux, il tape aussi du pied et joue du

piano. À l'occasion, il peut donc remplacer la pianiste Louise Lepage, mais ici, il se concentre surtout sur le reste. Son arrivée change-t-elle beaucoup le son du groupe? «*Absolument pas, la seule chose qui change, c'est les chansons qu'il chante*» répond Gaston.

Ce n'est pas surprenant. En entrevue en 2014, Michel Bordeleau nous avait expliqué le style du groupe: «*Dans les dernières années, il y a des jeunes comme Danny Baillargeon et Simon Riopel qui sont arrivés, mais l'instrumentation n'a jamais beaucoup changé. Ça reste toujours autour du piano et de la guitare. Malgré les années qui passent et les formations qui changent, Hommage garde une continuité, une manière de faire: c'est de la chanson à répondre. Dans la plupart des groupes, il y a un mélange de pièces instrumentales et de chansons, mais dans le nôtre, les instruments sont au service de la chanson et non le contraire*».

Au début, Hommage s'est concentré sur les vieilles chansons de Saint-Côme et ses premiers disques en ont témoigné. Quand les musiciens apprenaient une chanson de

quelqu'un, ils essayaient de la reproduire de la même manière, en la chantant le moins possible. Puis, avec les années, si le répertoire de Saint-Côme demeure prédominant dans leurs disques, ils ont intégré quelques autres chansons de grands porteurs comme Jean-Paul Guimond, Madame Rose-Aimée Blanchard, son fils Alphonse Morneau et autres. En 2016, ils ont fait paraître *En rappel*, leur sixième album: Serge le décrit: «*C'est un disque de chansons qu'on faisait en rappel pendant les spectacles. Les gens nous demandaient sur quel disque ils pouvaient les trouver, mais ce n'était pas enregistré. On retrouve des titres comme «Les prisons de Londres», «Dans Paris», «L'hologramme», «Souffrance» et une quinzaine d'autres qui sont assez connus dans le milieu. Les interprétations sont le plus souvent locales dans le style de Saint-Côme. Dans un avenir prochain, Hommage prévoit lancer un autre disque qui sera le premier avec Jean-François Branchaud. Parions que l'esprit sera encore une fois en parfaite continuité avec ce que le groupe offre depuis presque trois décennies*».

Critiques

Còig

Rové (Indépendant)



C'est le deuxième album du «supergroupe» de Cap Breton. Ils ont perdu un violoniste depuis leur début, mais n'ont pas changé

de nom pour refléter le nombre réduit. Aucune importance, car cette absence ne les diminue en rien. C'est plutôt l'inverse qui s'est produit avec cet album qui s'avère être le meilleur des jeunes lions de la musique traditionnelle de la côte est. On retrouve cinq chansons et sept pièces instrumentales sur *Rové*, toutes magnifiquement enregistrées et mixées par Dave Gunning. J'ai vraiment été heureux de constater qu'ils accordaient plus de place à chanter cette fois. Rachel Davis et Darin McMullen possèdent tous deux des voix intéressantes

et la reprise de *Solsbury Hill* (Peter Gabriel) par McMullen était une belle surprise. On peut admirer la pureté de la voix de Davis sur *Down the Road*. Au niveau instrumental, peu de gens les accotent. Jason Roach, qui est à son meilleur pour les passes rapides et enlevées, accompagne de belle manière les violons de Davis et de Christine Crowley. McMullen joue de la guitare, du violoncelle, du bouzouki, de la mandoline, de la mandole, du pipeau et de la flûte et ses choix d'instruments d'accompagnement sont toujours parfaits sur chaque piste. Les reels, les gigue et les strathspeys abondent, comme on pouvait s'y attendre et ont même droit à un ajout surprenant sur l'air de Dave Brubeck. Quatre personnes qui jouent *Three To Get Ready* dans un groupe qui s'appelle «cinq» (còig) en gaélique, n'est-ce pas charmant? Achetez leur album, il vient juste de sortir!

— Par Tim Readman

— Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Durham County Poets

Glenashaw Road (Indépendant)



Cet album a retenu mon attention grâce au blues inquiétant et boueux de la pièce-titre en ouverture.

L'âme perdue regarde l'eau morte puis se fait offrir une bouteille par le diable en personne, sous la fine pluie des tonitruations brûlantes de la slide guitare.

Puis vient un jump blues et ses cuivres, un air inspiré du jazz ou blues électrique hard, et ainsi de suite. Ce quintette de la Vallée de la Chaudière (au sud du Québec) compte quelques multi-instrumentistes et chacun de ses membres participe à la création des chansons. Ils expriment les nombreuses facettes du blues, et avec succès.

Ces musiciens font preuve d'un bon goût musical tout en y ajoutant une petite touche. Le groupe est rallié par le chanteur principal Kevin Harvey, qui doit être un des chanteurs de blues les plus sous-estimés du Canada, et dont le style me rappelle Eric Bibb. Une des deux reprises, *On Your Bond* de Blind Willie Johnson, offre un duo mémorable formé de Harvey et de l'artiste invité Suzie Vinnick. On sent l'influence de Louis Jordan dans *Outside Cat* de David Whyte. Voilà un album très varié qui réussit pourtant à être cohérent, et dont l'ensemble représente bien plus que la somme des parties.

— Par Mike Sadava

— Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard



A Point Of View

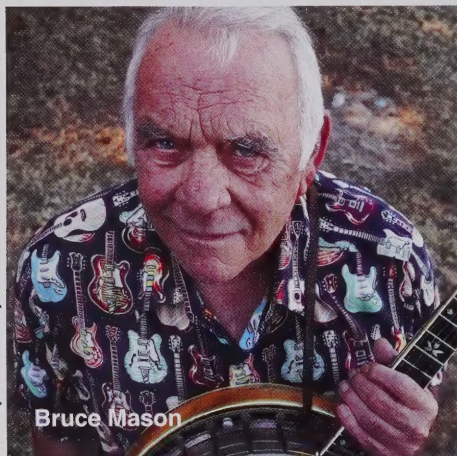


Photo: By Victor Anthony

Bruce Mason pays tribute to the incredible, inspirational legacy of past and present Indigenous art.

Something old, new, borrowed, or blue has most likely stopped you in your tracks recently; momentarily buzzed, and maybe even awakened, by the shock wave of excellent, ubiquitous Indigenous art. Pick any genre, or discipline: music, visual, theatre, literature, fashion, or yet-unnamed artistic pigeonhole. The work of Indigenous/Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit artists is one of the most exciting creative forces in Canada and, arguably, on an endangered Earth.

At once a renaissance, a revival, and a resistance, it's rising, phoenix-like, from the still-smouldering ashes of what can only be described as genocide.

Witness the raising of Jim Hart's jaw-dropping, heart-breaking *Reconciliation Pole* at UBC. Or experience Brian Jungen's life-size dinosaur skeletons, crafted from white plastic lawn chairs, and colourful masks made from Nikes. The work of Tomson Highway, multidisciplinary, Red Sky, A Tribe Called Red, the finger-style guitar of Don Ross, Tanya Tagaq's voice, or the *Power in the Blood* resurgent Buffy Sainte-Marie. It would take too many words to quantify the impact of Native authors. We are truly blessed, no debate required.

And here we are, in the dog days of a fizzling sesquicentennial—150 years since Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick confederated. Collectively, we blew a cool half billion in federal tax dollars to celebrate. Never mind the additional big bucks spent by provinces; all that beer, all those flags; some 500 "projects"—everything from giant snakes

and ladders in Calgary, to a rented, six-storey, 11-ton rubber duck, in Ontario.

First Nations rained on our year-long parade, rightfully, justifiably, shamefully so. One highlight: Ken Monkman's super-imposed nude, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, lounging in the foreground of the 1864 Charlottetown constitutional meetings. "She's trying to get a seat at the table, or she could be a hired entertainer," the artist explained.

An art-inspired epiphany once came to me, courtesy of a Peter La Farge recording, back in the early days of the so-called "folk craze." Before Bob Dylan signed a record deal, La Farge had co-authored the song, *As Long As The Grass Shall Grow*, with the future Nobel laureate. La Farge also wrote *The Ballad of Ira Hayes*—the story of a Pima tribe member, who was one of five Marines who raised the U.S. flag on Iwo Jima. The song was, later, a relatively minor, but signature, hit for Johnny Cash, who identified as part Cherokee. The song still makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck. But La Farge, like Hayes, died a broken death in skid-row-hotel obscurity.

The extraordinary recent documentary *Rumble*, subtitled *The Indians Who Rocked The World*, shares more missing chapters in the litany of untold stories. The Sundance-award-winning film takes its title from a 1958 Link Wray recording. The only instrumental ever banned by radio, *Rumble* unleashed power chords in three growling, first fuzzy blasts that still resonate, undiminished by time. "If it hadn't been for Link Wray, and *Rumble*, I never would have picked up a guitar," recalls Pete Townsend of The Who.

He is among some three dozen marquee celebrities who cite major influences from Indigenous artists in jazz, blues, rock, folk, heavy metal. . . The dozens of iconic mixed-blood trailblazers include: "Father of the Delta Blues" Charley Patton (Choctaw/African-American), "Queen of Swing" Mildred Bailey (Couer d'Alene), Jimi Hendrix (Cherokee/African-American), as well as Wray (Shawnee), Sainte-Marie (Cree). . . Front and centre, though, stands The Band's Robbie Robertson (Mohawk), who says: "From childhood, I was told, 'Be proud of being Indian; but be careful who you tell'." Robertson now vows: "You wouldn't let me talk about it before. Well, now I'm going to talk real loud."

Alongside African-American, European, and other building blocks, Indigenous influences

are at the root, the heart, and soul of world music. Tonalities, rhythms, phrasings, ancient native melodies and harmonies, hypnotic drum heartbeats, and chants are among the ongoing contributions. Too often unknown, or suppressed, but infused with tradition, innovation, and resistance.

One of the signposts in Indigenous reclaiming of cultural territory is the Grammy-nominated *Native North America (Vol. 1)*, featured in the 15th anniversary edition of *Penguin Eggs*. More than a decade in the making, the package of 34 tracks with 120 pages of liner notes was curated by Kevin Howes, who continues to compile unheard, undocumented, unavailable Indigenous music.

He says: "During our current era of reconciliation, music is an extra-special connector, teacher, and healer.

"The time is most certainly now to celebrate life and to show people that we will not stand for ignorance, intolerance, oppression, and hatred," Howes adds. "Music does save and it unifies and informs us, like nothing else."

Vancouver Folk Music Festival co-founder Gary Cristall has spent many years researching Anglo-Canadian folk music for an upcoming book, and teaches college-level courses on our culture. He says: "The most dynamic sector of culture in Canada today is Indigenous/Aboriginal/First Nations/Inuit artists in every discipline. It is both based on old and new...to describe it as an explosion is modest."

Just one example, among so many: Arctic-focused Aakuluk Music, whose mission is to promote contemporary Inuktitut music to the world. One of the artists on the fledgling label, Riit, reports: "Every time I perform for non-Inuit crowds, it feels like I take a step forward into decolonization. Going from a generation shamed for speaking Inuktitut to a generation making music in Inuktitut, I'm pretty damn proud and thankful!"

I, for one, have enough scientific evidence about anthropogenic climate change. I also want to hear stories from the front lines, especially the Arctic. Ditto appalling, ongoing, unjust conditions, inspiring visionary leadership, truthful history, and real-life First Nations perspectives. This is painful stuff, folks.

But as Buffy Sainte-Marie says: "Keep calm and decolonize." All that is required is what the musical community does best: to listen, respectfully, supportively. The payoff is inestimable and too-long overdue.

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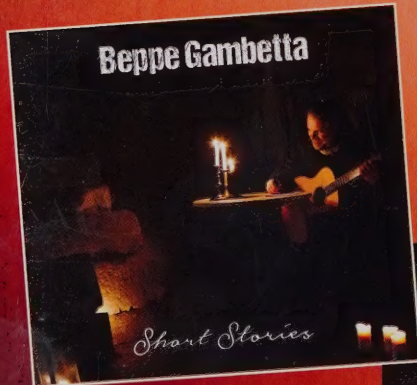
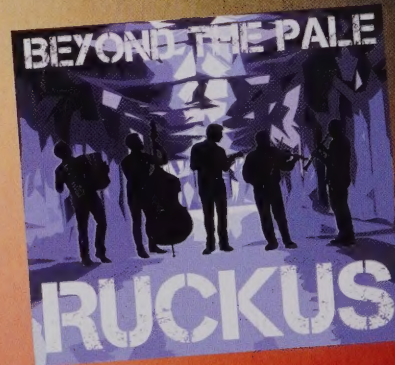
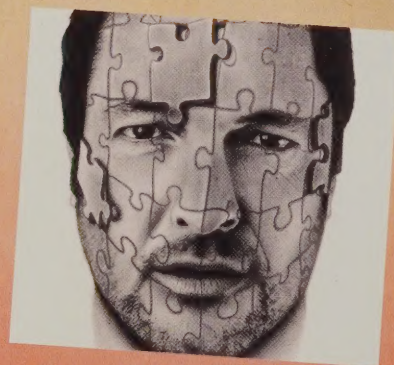
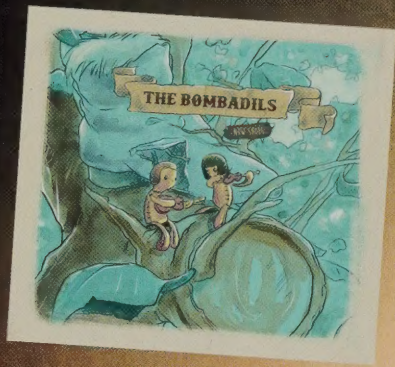
Ashley is also excited to be opening
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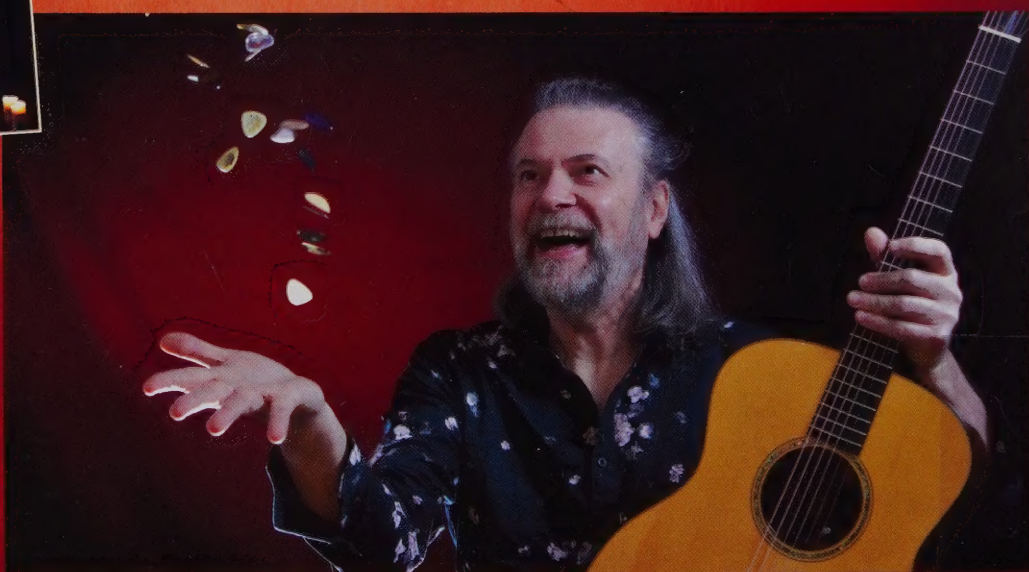
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